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The R E F I N E R,

O R,

GOD'S METHOD OF PURIFYING
HIS PEOPLE:

BY

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AND FORMERLY OF

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With a Recommendatory Preface by the Rev. Mr. BARKER,
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H U L L,

PRINTED BY J. AND W. RAWSON, FOR R. BATTLE,
MANOR-ALLEY, LOWGATE.

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PRINTED BY J. AND W. BARNES, FOR A. TATLER,

THE PREFACE.

THE favorable reception with which Mr. WALKER's sermons, on the covenant of grace, met, and the use and benefit they were of to some persons by whom they were read, are motives sufficiently encouraging to me to recommend another course of his sermons, hitherto unpublished, no less excellent in their way and likely to be useful, than the former. The subject on which they principally treat, is that of sanctification, or God's way and method of purifying his people, in order to render them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Taking into consideration the fallen depraved state and condition of man, and how utterly unfit he is, while unchanged by divine grace, to appear before the infinitely holy God, this subject it must be allowed is of unquestionable importance and universal concern. To elucidate what is here affirmed, shall be my chief aim and object in the subsequent part of the preface.

There are in the christian religion two grand essential points, with which it highly becomes every one who professes to embrace and espouse that religion, to be well acquainted. The points intended are *Justification* and *Sanctification*, between which there is certainly as close and indissoluble an union, as between a cause and its effects. — They are so indispensibly necessary to salvation, that inevitable perdition must assuredly be the lot of such as are not the subjects of them. “That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and that, “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh living be justified,” are truths of infallible certainty. God’s holy righteous law requires an exact unfailing conformity to all its commands, and denounces a terrible curse on every transgressor of the same. How then shall sinful man appear before the tribunal of God? How can he escape condemnation and punishment? On the footing of human worthiness and merit he is utterly incapable of doing either the one or the other. And to be convinced of this is no small mercy; especially, if the conviction excites earnestly to pray, as the devout Psalmist did, “Enter
“ not

P R E F A C E.

v

“not into judgment with thy servant, O
 “Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living
 “be justified?” Without an absolutely
 perfect righteousness none can be justified
 —this is evident from the tenor of God’s
 word, and the nature of things. But since
 man is destitute of such a righteousness,
 where is it to be found, and in what manner
 is he to become possessed of it? The Lord
 Jesus, by paying a complete obedience to
 the divine law, and sustaining its curse in
 behalf of sinners, has wrought out a perfect
 righteousness for them, which on their be-
 lieving in him, he graciously imputes to
 them, and for the sake of which they are
 completely justified. Ask a true believer,
 on what he fixes his dependence for the par-
 don of his sins and acceptance with God?
 His answer will be, on the atonement and
 righteousness of Christ *alone*. Tho’ he lives
 in the exercise of penitence, faith, humility,
 piety, &c. yet all are utterly disclaimed and
 renounced in point of reliance, and not suf-
 fered to arrogate the smallest share of that
 honor, to which only the consummate right-
 eousness of the Lord Jesus is entitled. He is
 fully assured that the work of redemption is

finished by the blessed *Emmanuel*; and that all who are justified, “are justified *freely* by his “grace.” A total self-renunciation is an effect which omnipotent grace alone can produce. Men are very slow in learning, and very reluctant in admitting the truth as it is in Jesus. If they are made sensible of the insufficiency of their own obedience to justify and save them, they are prone to rely on something wrought in them, on their supposed conversion, or on some change which they have experienced. Many who are advocates for the doctrine of justification by faith, do nevertheless discover a self-righteous bias by attributing a certain degree of instrumentality or agency in this business to their believing. But by carefully advert-
ing to the Scriptures, it will appear that it is not the *act*, but the *object* of faith by which any of the human race is justified. To be justified by faith, and to be justified *by the blood of Christ*, are synonymous expressions convertible terms, with *St. Paul*, Rom. 5.— If any thing whatever besides the bare work of Christ is depended upon for salvation, the grace of God is not known in truth, and while this is the case no real benefit will be derived

derived from Christ. His infinitely precious merits alone must be the ground of a sinner's reliance, or otherwise he will profit him nothing. - Let every one then look well to the foundation, on which he builds his eternal hopes. Christ is the true and safe basis of trust for future happiness, but every other kind of confidence is, as to its nature and tendency, fallacious and destructive. And it is this faith in the Redeemer for salvation *solely* by his merits, which is the principle of all acceptable obedience. It is through faith that the heart of man is purified. And it is through faith, or a belief of the truth as exhibited in the gospel, that any one is sanctified. Christ said to his disciples, "Now ye are clean thro' the word which I have spoken unto you." Accordingly he thus prays to his Father on their behalf; "Sanctify them thro' the truth"—adding, "Thy word is truth."—While a man is unacquainted with and disbelieves the fundamental truths of the gospel, however decent his character, and moral his conduct may be, he is doubtless un sanctified. His heart must be replete with false and erroneous notions concerning God, and the way
in

in which a sinner may be pardoned, reconciled to, and at peace with him. In such a state he is utterly unfit to perform any service pleasing and acceptable to God, and consequently cannot be an object of his delight and approbation. On the highest authority we are assured, that "without faith it is impossible to please God." It is only by faith in Christ's atonement for the remission of sins, that the conscience is purged from dead works to serve the living God. While a person is under the power and prevalence of unbelief, he is indisputably unholy and unsanctified, and therefore unfit to enter into the kingdom of heaven. He is really destitute of that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Hence learn of what vast magnitude and importance the doctrines of Justification and Sanctification are. By the *former* we are *entitled* to glory; by the *latter* we are *made meet* for the same. The grand interesting question to be resolved is, are you a real Christian; a true believer? Is the finished work of the Redeemer, exclusive of every other consideration, your trust and hope towards God? Is Jesus, as a divine all-sufficient Saviour, precious

precious to your souls; and will you admit nothing to rival him in the important concern of salvation? If this is actually the case with you, I may venture to pronounce pretty peremptorily concerning the goodness and safety of your state, tho', on account of remaining depravity, you may at times write bitter things against yourselves, and be under no small apprehensions of perishing everlastingly. Only cleave to the Lord your Saviour with full purpose of heart, and make him the sole object of your dependence for eternal life and happiness, and as certain as God is true, you shall never be confounded.

But if you are either a self-righteous Pharisee, or a careless unconcerned sinner, living without God in the world, or in a state of open hostility against him and his holy laws, you are infallibly out of the way of peace and salvation, and dying in this state, you cannot escape the damnation of hell. Consider, seriously consider, your alarming situation and dangerous condition, and earnestly beseech God to deliver and save you.—See your perishing need of Christ as a Saviour from guilt and wrath—fly to him for refuge—let the life you henceforth live,
be

be by faith in the Son of God—so shall you not only escape impending misery, but obtain everlasting life and salvation. And these few introductory considerations, as well as the following discourses, may be abundantly blessed, and made signally useful, promoting the spiritual and eternal welfare of each individual into whose hands they may at any time fall, is the very sincere prayer of

The EDITOR

HULL, September,
1790.

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The REFINER.

S E R M O N I.

Romans vii. 25.

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh, the law of sin.

THERE is scarcely a point, in which the grand enemy of souls is more fatally successful in his unceasing labours to destroy us, than the numberless errors he has artfully introduced, as to the nature of our conflict with sin in this world. For while he seals up the eyes, and sears, as it were, the consciences of the greater number of our hapless race against any sight or feeling of the power, malignity, and guilt of sin; he in the mean time leads others to boast themselves of, I know not what, perfect deliverance from the motions of sin; and so, by the force of an overweening pride, or unfeeling insensibility of conscience, to fancy they have no sin to struggle with; no

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warfare

warfare or fight to maintain against its inveterate workings : Nay, and where he cannot, by any means, wholly prevent a deep and humble sense of the corruption of sin in the heart, he hath another dart to throw for there he will labour to distress and confound the awakened mind ; persuading the soul that no change hath been wrought upon it ; as if the workings of inherent depravity were incompatible with a state of grace.

Wherefore, amidst these mistakes on the one hand, and on the other, the point itself is of the last importance ; for if we have not a clear and distinct apprehension of it, we shall neither understand what the Saviour has to do for us and in us, nor (a very essential point of christianity) the nature of our christian warfare, how we are to wage it fighting against sin.

The apostle Paul, from the 14th verse to the end of this remarkable chapter Rom. vii. describes a very severe conflict, which he found in himself, between two very different principles of action always resisting each other ; namely, the old and new man. He tells us he found in himself two contrary prin-

principles or laws, both requiring obedience; the law of sin in his members warring against the law of God written on his renewed mind, labouring to bring him into captivity. Although he had a new nature, and on the whole, walked after the Spirit, was led by the Spirit, yet he had a sharp contention and conflict with the body of sin within him. Under this he groaned, being burdened at present, and expected to do so till that happy day of release, when mortality should be swallowed up of life.

We may take this occasion, therefore, of opening this important passage; as well because it is eminently descriptive of a new and regenerate state, as also because it draws the very proof of that state from those very circumstances which are peculiarly apt to raise doubts in the best of God's children. From whence it will appear (if the will of God be so) to the conviction of the perfectionist on the one hand, that there are corrupt mixtures and dross in the best of God's children, and to the comfort and instruction of truly humble believers on the other hand, what those mixtures are.

The subject commences at the 14th verse:

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“ For,

“ For, saith he (I would give you his sense with his words), whatever unenlightened minds may judge, we who have been led into the knowledge of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, know that the moral law is spiritual, extending its demands to the soul with all its powers, thoughts, dispositions, principles, motives and ends ; requiring internal and spiritual, as well as external and bodily, service, and forbidding all sin of the heart and lip, as well as every irregularity in the life and conversation. But though we who are spiritual know this spirituality of the law, yet I cannot but confess to you in my own person, after all the renovation of the spirit of my mind ; that by means of the remainder of sin and corruption dwelling in me, I come so far short of the demands of this excellent law, that I find I am still in too great measure carnal, and, comparatively speaking, but imperfectly renewed : So that when at seasons corruption takes advantage of temptation, and carries me away along with it, I am so fearfully sensible of this baneful influence of my corrupted nature, as to be almost ready to conclude, that I, like wicked Ahab, am sold under sin.”

Ver.

Ver. 15. "For that," saith he, "which (in such cases of infirmity, temptation, surprize, or the like) I do, I allow not;" I never err with deliberate choice, the settled judgement and constant purpose of my soul being determinately against it. "For what I would," the duties I purpose to myself, in the governing views of my life, and fain would be found in the daily practice of;—"that" too often, through inadvertence, sloth, indolence, the coming in of other concerns, &c. "do I not;" at least not in so spiritual a manner as I desire to do; but on the contrary, "what I hate," the sins I have habitually and determinately the utmost abhorrence of, and at times, my warmest indignation is raised against; I say, "what I" thus "hate," that at times, to my infinite grief and abundant humbling before God, "do I."

Ver. 16. But "if then I do that which I would not;" if in all these cases in which I come short of God's law, or act contrary to it, I am plainly carried away against my positive will, and settled choice; then, I say, it is plain, "I consent to the law that it is good," and most desirably righteous.

Ver. 17. "Now then," since I sincerely hate and disallow whatsoever I do contrary to the law, and since I most heartily also esteem all its precepts concerning all things to be excellently right; "It is no more I that do it," not I my whole self, as in my unrenewed judgment and will; not I, with full consent and choice; "it is not," therefore, "I that do it, but sin," corrupt nature, "that" to this hour "dwelleth in me." All such omissions and commissions, I charge, I say, and I must charge, upon my sinful nature; and I have all reason, all imaginable reason, so to do.

Ver. 18. "For I know," having found by fatal experience, "that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." I know my nature is sinful, and altogether sinful, having not the least good inclination, or disposition in it, and which is manifest to me by daily proof; "for," though the grace working in me "to will" whatsoever the law demands of me, "is present with me," so that I fully, from the heart, am bent upon all holiness and goodness, and that is become the steadfast bias of my mind: "but" yet, notwithstanding this purpose, this fixed and
gracious

gracious purpose of heart; yet, I say, "how to perform that which is good I find not:" I can never bring these purposes effectually into due execution, being always kept back, in a measure, from attaining to that which I so earnestly desire to be and to do. The apostle, in some following verses, repeats and confirms these assertions, and the whole result of the passage is contained in the words of the text.

Ver. 25. "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." "So then," to sum up all in few words, in my own settled judgment and choice, as renewed by grace, "I myself" (with full consent and approbation) "serve the law of God," submitting myself wholly, unfeignedly, and unreservedly to it, without objecting to any part or parcel of it; but yet, at the very same time, "with the flesh," as there are workings of corruption in me, I am sometimes brought into sin by them; and always so holden and restrained by their power, that I cannot do always the things that I would; so that in this respect I must be also said to "serve the law of sin."

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From this passage, thus explained, we may now make some useful reflections. And, in the first place, we see here, without controversy, that the children of God are not so renewed in this world, as to have no remainder of sin in them, or, in other words, to be set free from the strivings of corrupt nature; on the contrary, that its workings, or general influence, will always restrain us from a perfect conformity to the law of God, and in many cases actually involve us (the best of us) in guilt. So saith another apostle, "In many things we offend all." And a third, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves."

There is a filthiness of the flesh, and a filthiness of the spirit, the one or the other, or both of which, are intimately mixing in all we do, spoiling more or less the purity of our designs and intentions, and the religious simplicity of our ends and aims. What can possibly be stronger than the expressions we have been hearing from the mouth of the apostle; "I am carnal, sold under sin; the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do?" or what more explicit than the cause he assigns for all

all this: "Sin that dwelleth in me?" and how expressly also doth he describe this accursed principle, stiling this self-same "sin dwelling in him," to be in other words, the flesh, in which dwelleth no good thing? wherefore we may,

Secondly, Hence conclude, (and a conclusion it is of infinite moment to every one of us), that whosoever doth not find these impure mixtures of dross in his soul and services, hath, as yet, all to learn of the spirituality of God's law, and of the corruption of his own nature; and consequently hath all the work of true repentance, the whole of it, still to begin. And this was the very case of the Pharisees. Christ describing one of them in this very character to represent all the rest, and in them all of their stamp to this day. Wherefore we take up the words of St. Paul in this passage we have been considering. Do you not understand, have you no degree of experience of the truth of what he is here speaking? "the law is spiritual—but I am carnal, sold under sin—for that which I do, I allow not—for what I would, that I do not, but what I hate that I do." Again, "in the flesh dwelleth

leth no good thing." Have you no just sense of this? "For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not—for the good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." Do you not find, I say, by your own heart experience, what these expressions mean? There are no words in the whole of the scriptures more plain and intelligible to every regenerate soul; yet you are at a loss, it may be, to enter at all into the meaning of them? Therefore, if this be indeed so, you certainly know nothing either of the law or of yourselves: And if you mean to become, in any sort, christians, you must necessarily begin by making a diligent search into both the one and the other. But perhaps you will say, you have a just sense of these deep expressions, and do enter fully into them: Wherefore to you I say,

Thirdly, That though you do understand these things, and find corruption in you; nay, and can talk ever so well of its various contentions and workings, yet that will not prove you to have grace in your hearts, and to be a regenerate soul. There may be, and there often is, much light in the understanding,

standing, and that may beget a great stir in the conscience, when, nevertheless, there may be no change wrought in the heart: No, none whatsoever, either in the will or affections. Wherefore consider earnestly, that while the apostle describes here a regenerate person as having much sin and corruption, and that but too apt to gain advantage over him; I say, at the same time that he describes a regenerate person thus, he does at the same time set him out as having a will to all good, as hating all evil, as delighting (pray observe the expressions) in the law of God in the inner man, as warring against the law of sin in his members, and as groaning under it as the heaviest and most intolerable of all his burdens.

Now there are thousands who have much light and knowledge, who yet cannot say one of these things; not a word of all this: no, not with the highest measure of light in their understanding, or most reproving pangs of guilt in their natural conscience. All this may be, and yet such not be able to say, with any pretence of truth, that they have daily a will to all goodness in direct opposition to their ease, their sloth, their pride,

pride, their worldliness, &c. or that they should hate evil as to labour daily to keep their heart with all diligence, not admitting vain thoughts, or foolish imaginations so much as to lodge there; or that they delight in the law of God in the inner man, so as daily to choose and prefer to think of it, reading in it, hide it in their heart, and practice it. Or again, that they penitently groan, and that daily under the weight of the body of sin.

There are, doubtless, many now hearing me who will understand this doctrine according to godliness, but who yet also know that, but follow them home to their houses, and the course of their lives is a daily contradiction to it. Wherefore this matter demands the most serious notice. For when people have heard a great deal (as where the gospel is faithfully preached they will hear) of the spirituality of God's law, and the corruption of their own nature, and are grown up to some degree of acquaintance with these things, they may still be apt to rest short of any truly regenerating change notwithstanding: and especially this may be apt to be the case, if what hath been said about the law and the gospel hath produced some

some awakenings of conscience, and these awakenings some outward profession and reformation. Wherefore we are not to rest, if we would not miserably delude ourselves, or be deluded, till we have made full proof of a genuine, real, true inward change. And if you ask, how shall we know or do this? Then the answer to this question is the

Fourth use we are to make of this passage; for by it we may certainly prove ourselves whether we are in the faith or not. In order to which, observe carefully that here is truly and justly represented the actual struggle between grace and nature, which there is in every regenerate soul. In relating which conflict, two contrary principles are brought before you, as both dwelling in the same person; which the apostle expresses by two selves, his natural self and his renewed self, as two natures or spirits of different characters dwelling in the tabernacle of his body.

Now concerning his renewed self, he says, that habitually and determinately he consented to the law or will of God, that it was above all things good to be desired, honoured, loved, and followed; that consequently he actually delighted in it after the inward man,

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choosing and preferring (as the word inward delighting must imply) to think of it, study in it, practice it, and do it : Nay farther, that he actually served it with the bent of his mind, and consequently disallowed and hated whatsoever was contrary to it ; yet, as concerning his natural self, he confesses, that at the very same time he was "carnal," filthy in flesh and spirit ; nay actually "sold under sin," in actual bondage, that is, as a slave is to a cruel master ; that in consequence of this he was sometimes, and that unavoidably brought into captivity by this law of his members ; and so, in that respect, might properly enough be said to serve with his "flesh the law of sin."

Now I beseech you, is there any contradiction here ? It must be so ; how can it possibly be otherwise while two such different principles, as grace and sin dwell together. The truth indeed is, and a remark it is worth the notice : When we talk of a christian, we are wont to conceive a perfect character ; when we talk with him, we find him the very thing here described ; a person in whom evidently the "flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh."

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The question is not, therefore, whether I am perfect, but whether I am regenerate? and so not whether I have no corruption in me, but whether I have grace in me, warring against that corruption, and in the general course overcoming it? You will say, perhaps, how shall I know that? I find that the "good that I would, I do not." And again, "that the evil I would not I too often do," and this it is makes me to doubt. But do you really find this? Here lies the entrance of many thousand souls into ruin. Do you really find that you would do, with all your soul (heart) the "good you do not?" And so again, would not do the "evil you do?" It is a hard thing to have so much as a will to do this; nothing but grace can give it you: but if indeed you do find it, then it is plain (for of yourselves you cannot have it) God hath given you the will; and in that just case I may answer for you, that you also, with the apostle, "consent unto the law that it is good," as above explained, "that you truly delight in it in the inner man," and that you actually "serve it with your whole mind." And beyond these expressions, rightly understood

as reaching to the whole man, body, soul and spirit, I know of none more eminently descriptive of a gracious state in the whole book of God.

Wherefore you who especially fear God take this passage into closest consideration. Have you abidingly and daily the complaint of the regenerate man here described? This is no bad token. But can you adopt too, without partiality and without hypocrisy, his daily disposition and conduct? then it is manifest (for this your daily conduct proves it) that you can be no mistaken hypocrite.

In this happy case then, so it be indeed your case, be not terrified in the views of your corruptions, as if they would either finally condemn or enslave you; be faithful, and they cannot; be faithful, and they shall not do either the one or the other; continue only manfully to fight with them in the armour and in the strength of God, and you shall receive the cleansing operations of the exalted great Head of the church, to refine and purify your dross. He, I say, the Lord whom you delight in shall daily give you the victory, and shall daily advance you in grace and purity; till the tabernacle

bernacle of your body being dissolved, he shall indeed perfect you in his image, and exalt you to his heavenly kingdom, there to offer him "an offering in righteousness." Amen.

S E R M O N II.

"And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," Matt. viii. 2.

THAT the whole heart and nature of man is defiled by sin; that there are impure mixtures of dross and filthiness both of flesh and spirit, even in God's people, though renewed by grace; are truths so abundantly evident from the word of God, and (as lately) have been so often insisted on, that I need not now delay time in proof or observation upon either. What I mainly intend at this time, is, to exhibit to your faith the Lord Jesus, as anointed, set apart, and appointed, to cleanse, refine, and purify his people from these their various sinful defilements. In which view we may,

First, Inquire what we are to understand by Spiritual Cleansing in general, " Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. Whence,

Secondly, It will appear, that it is the peculiar office of Christ thus to cleanse and purify his people : And that,

Thirdly, He is perfectly qualified for the work. And,

First, In a scriptural sense, what are we to understand by Cleansing ? — Cleansing as it referred to the leper in the text, we all understand : it implied a restoring his filthy and loathsome body to health and soundness. Now, therefore, the purification of the soul must, in like manner, consist in restoring it to spiritual health, holiness and purity ; in continually purging away that sensual and earthly filth and dross which cleaves in herently to it, till at length, by repeated cleansings, it be evidently brought out, and on the way to recover its original purity.

Observe, therefore diligently, that by the means of the fall, the soul of every man by nature, is turned to the basest and most dishonourable uses, having no rectitude, purity, or goodness in it. So is the testimony

of God : " In man's flesh," saith St. Paul, speaking by the spirit of God, " dwelleth no good thing." But the whole man, adds another scripture, " lieth dead in trespasses and sins." And though, in regeneration or effectual calling, there be spiritual life put into the soul ; namely, a real, powerful, and vital principle of holiness, yet it dwells still with a corrupted nature ; and consequently all the actings of the soul have a mixture of that corrupt principle in them.

This sinful nature still remains, I say, and hath still an abiding influence, mixing itself always in every thought, word, and work ; and through our want of continual watchfulness, and the exercising the grace that is in us, taking the reins often, and in too many instances, leading us to issues false, base, and sinful : So that the very best of men have cause to set their seal to the truth of David's acknowledgement. " Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." And again, to the words of St. Paul, " The good that I would, I do not," in that purity, that is, and perfection which I ought and wish : and too often, " the evil that I would not, that I do."

Now

Now, therefore, the work of spiritual cleansing or purification, is the spiritual purging away this bad mixture of corrupt nature, lessening, by various discipline this malignant principle ; and so, in scripture terms, " putting off (gradually) the old man, and crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts." But then, it should be carefully noted, the manner in which this is effected, in every regenerate soul, is by quickening, strengthening, and exalting the principle of grace, which acts on the contrary part ; for nature and grace are two opposites, continually and daily at war ; and whatsoever is gained by one, the other infallibly loses : they are in this respect like day and night, they cannot subsist together, but the one ever and invariably puts out the other. Grace in the heart is in this very manner, we know in the scriptures, compared to the light : to the light, I say, breaking in upon the morning, and " shining more and more unto the perfect day." But till it advances to that, darkness hath yet some influence ; for it is only perfect day that puts out darkness. At first we know there is a little opening dawn in the east ; like enlightening grace
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hewing itself first after the change of regeneration, amidst a multitude of dark corruptions: by degrees the morning light increases, and darkness seems flying away into the west; just as gradually true grace advances, and corruptions are, by its power, day by day subduing. And this particularly is the state of the regenerate man here upon earth. But at length the sun gets up to the midst of heaven, and no darkness anywhere remains in the sky. And this is the state of the believer's glory, when "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and all corruption shall be done away."

Now this comparison, imperfect as it is, may yet serve to illustrate, in a measure, the matter before us; both setting out the two extremes—the dark night of a natural state—and the perfect day of a state of glory—and somewhat also, at the same time, explaining how and in what manner the rising and advance of true grace in the soul, subdues and overpowers corruption, till finally the whole soul be perfected after the image of God.

We see, therefore, what is meant by Spiritual Cleansing or Purification. It is the daily recovery of the soul from its spiritual death;

death ; the mortification of nature by the growth of grace, till grace be made perfect, and sin done away. This, indeed, will not be, as we have intimated, till the body is laid in the grave, and the soul is admitted to the immediate vision of God : but, nevertheless, in every true believer, it is daily carrying forward in this life, and would be daily more forward, but for that lamentable sloth and neglect which marks, alas, the path too plainly, of every christian's walk. Yet,

Secondly, Hence it plainly appears, that it peculiarly is the office of Christ thus to cleanse and purify his people. So he is represented by the prophet, as one that is to sit over his people as the refiner doth over his metals. Who examines them with diligence, discerns the impure mixtures in them, determines the most effectual methods for cleansing them, addresses himself to the work, puts them into the furnace, and with care continues his operations, till, in the language of the prophet, " he hath purely purged away their dross." So is he spoken of by the apostle, in the epistle he writes to the Ephesians, " Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and

and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." And so again, in Cor. i. "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." And also in the benediction of St. Jude: "Unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To him be glory, &c."

My reason for giving this so peculiar a consideration is, that they who are much burdened under a sense of the strivings of their corruption may take encouragement in the reflection, that so long as they humbly seek and submit to, serve and obey him, it is the very office of Christ to sanctify and cleanse their sinful hearts. What saith his infallible word? "He that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood," now sits over us in heaven, "to try and refine us as gold and silver is refined." And will he forget, will he cast off his people for whom he

he died, his servants that serve him? No. "he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity." This was the very end and design of it—"and purify himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." It is true, you are far, very far from perfection, and have abundance of sin in your hearts; you are, and you know you are, exceedingly selfish; the world too, you know, hath gotten an undue influence; and the flesh too, you daily perceive, is a great and a mighty adversary: and on all these accounts you groan, being burdened.

Well, but look back, you whose case this is; what were you in former days? Did corruption then carry all before it? Did sleep, sloth, security, pride, selfishness, and self-indulgence, one or another of these and their consequences, fill up constantly your time and thoughts? Had divine, spiritual and heavenly things then at heart any weight with you? No, you know that you were then in your natural state, even dead in trespasses and sins. And did you then, I say, complain of corruption? was it still your heaviest grief that you was far from God? Nay, but I pray then consider, who has brought

brought you out hitherto? was it your own arm that helped you? or was it for any good in you that the Lord hath been thus gracious to you? May you not then say in the language of the prophet, "Who hath begotten me these?" And must you not answer to yourself: It is the Lord, it is he who hath wrought these works in me? And when you thus answer, how can you help suggesting to yourself: "He that hath begun a good work in me, he is faithful, he will perform, complete, and perfect it unto that day." And that the rather, when,

Thirdly, You consider also, that he is perfectly qualified for this office.—Now this qualification lies in the following points or particulars: His Skill, his Power, and his Care. None of these must be wanting in order to fit him for this great work. A refiner of metals must have Skill. He must be acquainted with the quality of his metal, the nature of the mixtures contained in it, and the method of their separation. He must have Power. Some principle which will forcibly disunite the metal from the dross, enter into and pass through the whole mass, break in pieces the union, and bring

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out the metal in a separate state. And, in the whole process, he must be diligent, carefully attending to his operation, and taking good heed not to do any material injury to the metal, when his single aim is, to consume the dross only. Now therefore, I say positively, that Christ is thus qualified for purifying the hearts of his people; for he is, and we, as christians, acknowledge him to be "God manifest in the flesh;" and therefore he can want no qualification for this work.

As such, I say, he hath Skill for it. This he must necessarily have; for in him, it is expressly declared, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." But if he possesses these infinite treasures, he must then necessarily know much better than we do the plague of our hearts, what it is, the subtilities of our corruptions, the strong-holds on which sin leans, the devices of satan, and every other enemy. He must necessarily, I say, know this, together with the most effectual method of mortifying corruption, and strengthening grace, disappointing the desires of our spiritual enemies, and making every thing work for his people's good and advancement. Take notice of that passage,
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"All things work together for good to them that love God." Now how is that? Why, Christ who is their Head, knows how to make his advantage (so to speak) of every thing for them; and so all things, without any exception, must, infallibly ~~must~~ work for their good. There is not any circumstance but he so directs and orders it, as to make it influentially good to them, either by the mortifying of some sin, or the quickening and exercising of some grace; nay, and by his all-wise providence, the Lord doth so suit the circumstances to the state of his people, that they are always in that very condition which is exactly fittest and best for them.

Now, therefore, if this be true, and we really desire that our Lord may be faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, shall we direct infinite wisdom to what are the best methods of effecting it? If not, why are we displeased and dissatisfied at the methods he pleases to use with us? St. Paul could say in a view of his manifold troubles, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." The weakening of the one he found to be the strengthening of the other; and therefore

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fore he adds this as the reason why he fainted not under so many and great tribulations; "For our light affliction, saith he, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

It would be a sovereign support under the changes and chances of this life, could we look on them always in this view.

How can that soul be discouraged or discomfited in any case, which sees that, in every case, all is ministered to it for its advancement in holiness, and greater fitness for glory? No; when a soul, it is supposed, truly loves God, and hungers and thirsts after righteousness, faints and complains, under trials and troubles, it is either because it prefers present ease to growth in grace, would be better pleased to be quiet than holy (which is a very ill sign of a truly regenerate heart); or else because it is not at that time stedfastly believing, that that trial is sent to promote its spiritual good. **II** But again, as Christ does not want Skill, so neither is he destitute of Power to purge and to purify the hearts of his people. This is plain from that one text, with which many others correspond, "God hath put all things in subjection

subjection under his feet, and given him to be head over all things to his church."

His power, therefore, is unbounded, infinite, universal; it reacheth over all things; and whereto soever it extends, the design of it, we see, is for the good of his people.

Here, then, it is evident, that Christ hath a power, an absolute power, over all things, and over every creature; and if so, then not one of them can move or stir a step but by his permission. When he permits-satan to go, he may go; but when he commands him to stop, then he is stayed. It is the very same with every other creature. All things are not only under his direction, but absolutely receive their whole power of acting from him.

Now, therefore, he hath all things visible and invisible under his hand, because no creature can act at all without his power, nor go a jot farther than his permission reaches. No case, therefore, can be too hard for him, and every thing must work for good to those whom he favors, since he, to whom all power in heaven and in earth is given, WILLs it to be so. Take one instance only of his power this way, but that a most glorious one; It

was ordained, that himself, in his manhood, should be "made perfect by his sufferings."

It is not meant, that by his sufferings he should be perfect in holiness, for that he was before; but that by sufferings he should perfect our salvation. To effect this, there-

fore, men, devils, Jews, Gentiles, governors, foldiers, people, all are let loose upon him.

Urged and excited by the deep malignity of satan, what hellish rage possessed this multitude! Nothing would satisfy but blood:

"Crucify him, crucify him. Why, what evil hath he done? I find no fault in him.

But they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him, crucify him." So they nail-

ed him to the cross, where he remained, till bowing his gracious head he yielded up the ghost.

Now by this he was to perfect, by this he did actually perfect, the work of man's salvation. All things were therefore made to bring about his design.

It is then agreed that Christ hath power to purge and to purify the hearts of his people.

It is agreed in speculation; but is it so in practice? Consider, in all your struggles with sin and temptation, were you ne-

ver dismayed? Did you never think that the conflict was too hard for you, and that you should not be able to endure? especially, did your heart never fail you when you were considering the length of the way and the vastness of the work? Nay, but where then was your steadfast persuasion of the power of Christ to keep you? Remember now what the apostle so confidently saith: "I know, saith he, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

The very first thing we should have before us, in every exercise of faith, is the power of Christ. The belief of this is the most difficult, and yet the most necessary to us. We fancy that we believe he is able; but no sooner does any accusation of conscience arise, than we shrink under a sense of guilt: ~~nor~~ no sooner does any temptation beset us, than our souls recoil within us. In the one case as well as in the other we mistrust the power of Christ. And therefore nothing, I suppose, is of more importance to our peace, than to be certainly assured of the truth of God: "that he hath put all things under

under his (Christ's) feet, and given him to be Head over all things to his church." But, Again, once more, the Care of the Lord Jesus is equal to his Skill and Power. As believers, we are now to consider him, in his exalted state, in the merit of his obedience unto death, sitting at the right hand of God. There he sits to receive returning sinners, and to confer on them pardon, acceptance with God, and the daily needful supplies of the gifts of his sanctifying spirit. As a king, under whose feet all things are put, he sits in heaven, defending and governing his church; and therefore you are thus to consider him, as an exalted living head, exercising his offices on the throne of his glory, towards all and every individual of his faithful people. In this respect, his care in general, and in particular, is manifest. In general, it does not suffer the gates of hell to prevail against his church. In particular, it does not suffer his believing people to be tempted above what they are able. Hear him speaking of his church by the mouth of the prophet, "I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it; I will keep it night and day." And

And the same prophet, speaking of the affectionate care Christ takes of his people, expresses it in this tender manner, "He shall feed his flock like a Shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." And yet again, with a still more tender sentiment, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." These are scriptures which abundantly express Christ's peculiar care of his people, while they plainly assure us, that that care is exercised in watching over, keeping, watering, feeding, and leading them forth into the path of life.

Thus it appears, beyond controversy, how perfectly qualified Christ is for the work of purifying his people. He is wise, powerful, and full of care. Oh! happy is their condition, who are actually under his discipline! "They go on from strength to strength:—" every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Happy is the person; yea, happy the people who are in such a case!

Oh!

Oh! my brethren, (suffer me to wish, to ask it) that we were of their happy number, sin dying with our years, and grace so growing as to renew our spirit day by day. Amen.

S E R M O N I I I .

“And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.” Deut. viii. 2.

THE hazardous passage of the Israelites through the great and terrible wilderness towards the promised land of rest, as it is a most lively and speaking picture of the christian's warfare in his journey to the heavenly Canaan, so will it afford him the most solid instruction under all the trials and burdens of it. The history of God's wonderful dealings with that people will give us a most reviving insight into the end of all

all his dispensations ; it will powerfully conduce to support us under the most afflicting of them, and abundantly help us to receive spiritual profit and advantage from them. When the promise of the text was made to the Jewish people, they were wandering in the wilderness, surrounded with difficulties and dangers ; exercised by dispensations, the design of which they could not understand ; and in this situation they frequently lost sight of God's gracious purposes in their favor, and were much discouraged by reason of the way. Wherefore to compose and animate their minds, Moses here suggests to them, that their warfare should ere long have an end, and that then they would review with pleasure and thankfulness, the history of God's dealings towards them. So shall it also be with the spiritual Israel, the people of God, who are passing through the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Canaan ; and who are seeking, through faith in the promises, a rest in that kingdom which cannot be shaken. The believing view of it now revives, and the possession of it will abundantly recompence them for all they can suffer in the way. They shall then confess
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with adoration, that all God's ways to them are love, and all his dispensations wisdom.

But as yet they are on their warfare, they have not yet attained; they are filled with the infirmities of a sinful nature: To cleanse and purify his people from these sinful defilements is the work of the exalted Redeemer; and *we*, I will venture to suppose, have no question, (having lately spoken on this subject) but that by his wisdom, power, and love, he is perfectly qualified for the work. But that our souls may not lose the benefit of this his wholesome discipline, it will now be of sovereign use to us to know the *means* which he employs to purge and sanctify his people.

But now since by whatever means a servant of God is improved in any grace, or is enabled to gain ground over any corruption, that mean must necessarily be but as an instrument by which the Redeemer works—In this view, all things must be understood as means used by him, at pleasure, for purifying and perfecting his people: For so it is expressly said; “We know all things work together for good to them that love God,

God, to them who are called according to his purpose ;" which nevertheless they do not, in any other than a spiritual sense. But the text more expressly seems to confine our attention to the *afflicting* dealings of God with his servants, as a means of working them to his will : For it follows : And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, that thou mightest know that " man doth not live by bread alone ; but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." And again the 5th verse, " Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." The intention then of Moses was to assert, that God makes use of *sufferings* as means to prove, to purge, and sanctify his people. He causes them to pass through the fire, as well that the faithful may be distinguished from the hypocrite, as that by the trial itself the believer may come out more pure and holy ; more dead to sin, and more alive to God. In speaking farther to this subject, we may enquire,

First, What those sufferings are, which

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God sends for proving and sanctifying his people. And,

Secondly, How it is, that they have this blessed effect. And,

First, we may enquire, What those sufferings are, which God sends for proving and sanctifying his people? And here, though all manner of sufferings are made effectual by the Head of the church, for this purpose yet the text naturally directs our attention to worldly calamities, as punishments which God inflicted on his people to purge and improve them in the wilderness; such as hunger and thirst, nakedness, hardship, perils, sickness, and the loss of friends. These we may see in a great variety of scripture instances conducing to this great end.

David suffered many worldly calamities and declares "it was good for him, that he might learn the statutes of the Lord." We see Abraham exercised with a series of worldly troubles; and Joseph laid low in a pit & a prison. We behold the Jewish people again and again under the yoke of slavery. We see Job on a dunghill; Daniel in a lions den; and Paul and Silas in the stocks. We read of God's dearest children, "of whom

the world was not worthy," lying at the doors of the rich, mourning the loss of dearest relations and friends, suffering shipwreck, beholding their children crucified before their eyes. Nay, we hear of these things, as *peculiarly* the lot of the righteous; for we are told of the wicked, "that they neither are plagued, nor are in trouble like other men." And what then can we possibly think is the *design* of all this, but that of good to the servants of God? The *design* doubtless is, to disengage them from a vain, sinful world, and to draw them nearer to that blessed Being, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." But, Secondly, It may be useful to enquire, how it is that worldly troubles are made effectual to this happy end of advancing the believer in holiness. Now this they do two ways:

1. By bringing out and making evident the corruptions of the heart, and the strength and power they have there; and which before such sufferings, were not, it may be, suspected. We are ever exceedingly apt to mistake ourselves, and, before we are tried, to fancy we have little of this or that lust a-

about us, which after trial we find abounding in us: yet, I say, we are erroneously apt to imagine before trial, that we should behave ourselves tolerably well, were such and such circumstances allotted to us. Were we reduced to poverty, for instance, how patient do we think, we would be; were we sick, how resigned; were we injured, how forgiving: But when the trial comes, it comes suited exactly to the purpose; we are put to the proof; and then the mistake appears, corruption discovers itself more formidable than before was imagined. The gracious heart (which always hates sin more than suffering) upon this discovery sets itself against it, and by the influence of the Spirit of grace, rendering the suffering effectual, and given in answer to earnest prayer and dependence of heart on Christ for it, the corruption loses ground, and the soul gains advancement in holiness.

The second is, That by sufferings the soul is excited to a more lively exercise of faith and grace, and thence gains strength and confirmation in them. Sufferings force the too secure believer to fresh and repeated exercises of humiliation, faith, love, and heavenly-

heavenly-mindedness: For in the sufferings as the pious soul neither sees nor flies to any other help than God, so is it forced to come to him with special importunity; "When I am in heaviness, saith the Psalmist, I will think upon God; when my heart is vexed I will complain." And again: "Out of the depths have I called unto thee, O Lord." And as in sufferings there must necessarily be thus a general exercise of grace; so, according to the special nature of the suffering, there will be also a peculiar exercise of some grace more than others; whether it be humility, or patience, or meekness, or contentment, &c. and hence also the soul advances in strength of grace through the Spirit. You see then by this time, beyond controversy, that sufferings are very peculiar and signal means of proving and refining God's people. It remains that we now proceed to some more direct improvement of the doctrine advanced.

We have all then, doubtless, known affliction in one shape or other. We have either, for instance, felt the sorrows of a sick bed ourselves, or been at least a witness of them in the departure of some friend or relation:

relation : Now what have we found was the present effect of such seasons of trouble ? I will not ask the children of God, how these sorrows have more abundantly endeared their heavenly Father to them, and taught them a higher esteem of the better world, where they shall sorrow no more ? but I will ask those who take their portion in this life, what *they* have found in the present effects of such pressing trouble ? Say, therefore, you who are children of this world, when you have been following some friend or dear relation to the grave ; when you heard the awful words—“ Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,”—your eyes had power no longer to retain your tears ;—what were then your thoughts of earthly things ? or again, when you have been brought near the confines of death yourselves, by some threatening disorder—your life hanging in doubt, and all the loving kindness of your friends, not persuading you that you were not hard at death’s door : In such cases as these, I ask—*Say*, what you experienced, and what you felt ? What then was the world, and all you had in it ? all your wealth and possessions, your friends, and worldly

worldly enjoyments? What comfort could you then take in them? or what relief could they bring you? What did you then think of every earthly thing? It is true, all this now is as a morning dream, it soon vanished away: Time and recovery soon gave the world its wonted power; and you are now the *fast slave* of pride, or passion, or covetousness, or pleasure, or sloth, or excess, (one or more of these members of the body of lust) as before: and so you *look back* on this scene which I have been bringing a little to your remembrance, as on some terrifying dream which once disturbed your sleep; yet you cannot altogether forget it, and you must own that there was somewhat in such seasons, remarkably suited to lead you to repentance and to God. But what then, are those seasons never to return? have you made a covenant with death? are you never to die, or to be sick any more? or when your sickness next commences, and death draws near to take you from the world, are they to come in any more pleasing manner? *that* without pain? *this* without terror? Alas, the approach of *both*, when they next seize you, will be much more

more terrible ! The sad remembrance of former sicknesses remaining unimproved, and the views you then had in them, will haunt your dying curtains, and speak such home convictions to you, as, at least at *that* season, you will be ill able to endure. You will then be apt to cry out with amazement, and in the bitterness of a wounded spirit, "Ah, that I had then harkened to the voice of conscience, when so plain and so loudly it spake in former afflictions ! Ah, that even then I had died ; better than now, with all the guilt of that abused visitation on my devoted head !" But with the righteous it shall not be so ; temporal calamities are, with them, only means of their spiritual improvement ; wherefore I would now desire to employ a few moments in earnestly exhorting *these* also, duly and properly to improve past afflictions : and that the rather, as I cannot but think that their forgetfulness of them is, in many instances, a principal cause of the slowness of their growth in grace. Now, therefore, if such an one shall ask, "How shall I improve by past afflictions ?" I answer,

1. Recollect and bring back before you,

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as circumstantial as may be, the history of God's afflictive dispensations towards you. Why should you not remember past corrections, as well as past mercies? especially when, as believers, you have all imaginable reason to be satisfied by experience, that corrections are not among the least of your mercies. Recollect, therefore, with what sickness have you been visited? what afflictions have you met with in your circumstances? what troubles have you experienced in the loss of relations or friends? what disappointments or grievous crosses in worldly things have befallen you? and what of these several things have been ministered to you in the different stages of life, in childhood, youth, manhood, or advancing years; adding together with it, the peculiar circumstances of each affliction; how you were brought into it, and how it ended. Be at pains with yourselves, to digest in your minds the progress of your afflictive corrections, adding, I say, as near as you can, the circumstances both of time and manner: for by this you will gain a great insight into the wisdom and love of God, in his afflictive dispensations toward you.

“ Affliction

"Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." But again,

2. When you have thus your past troubles before you, endeavour to see (for with this view I wished you to bring them to mind) what was the occasion of them. You are fully sensible, as God's children, that as God's hand was in them, so he doth not willingly, much less needlessly, afflict his own children. Try then to discover what was God's design in them. And what this was, it is possible, you will now be much better able to see, through God's after dealings with you, than when you were actually exercised by them. And in order that you may be the better able to enter into this enquiry, I would wish you to know and note carefully, that afflictions, as to God's children, have mostly one of these three designs: either, 1. To bring them to repentance for some sin they have committed, as the three days pestilence was sent to humble David for his sin in numbering the people: or, 2. To prevent some great snare to their souls, as to which they are imminently in danger: or, 3. To exercise and strengthen some

some grace, because of some trying circumstances into which the soul is soon to be brought, as was the case of Joseph before his exaltation. Examining your afflictions by these rules, you may probably arrive at some certainty as to the reasons of God's visiting you with them. Either you have been guilty of some sin, as pride, passion, covetousness, sloth, &c. and God meant to shew you it, and bring you to repentance for it; or you were in danger, by means of some circumstances in life on which you were entering, and God meant to stop you from exposing yourself to temptation; or else God's design was, to put you upon some humbling service for which you were not yet fit, and therefore he exercised you with some seasonable and suitable trouble. Now therefore, besides the general design of correction, which is to humble us, to increase our faith and love, and engage us to live more to God and above the world; besides this, I say, to search the special design of every affliction, in this manner proposed, cannot but be exceedingly useful; inasmuch as by it we shall gain a peculiar insight into the case of our souls,
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what it hath been, and consequently what it is; and at the same time obtain also an experimental proof of God's good-will to our spiritual interests, vastly confirming our faith and hope. But farther, having, as we suppose, the history of your corrections before you, and also seeing rightly their end and intention, you must,

3. Consider (for on this depends the proof of the whole) how it hath been, and how it is with you, as to those very things on account of which, in any affliction, you were afflicted? In order to which you must, in the first place, enquire, how you have behaved yourself concerning such sins as have at any time, brought correction upon you to cause you to repent of them? and this enquiry is so much the rather to be made if you have been corrected more than once for them. Again, you must enquire, if you have been, and are even yet, aware of such secret corruptions as might necessitate your heavenly Father to stop you from entering into any such circumstances of life where the temptation to them lay? or, if a passionate, proud, or slothful spirit had possession of you, and God checked you for it

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how is it now with you, respecting passion, pride, or sloth? Again, you must enquire also, How you have conducted yourself in such circumstances, places, stations, callings, for which God was preparing you by correction? whether humbly and dutifully towards God and man, seeking God's glory, and studying to please him, rather than yourself or others?

From such enquiries, faithfully, not slothfully, made, you will gain matter of deep humiliation and usefulness, and be led also to the last thing required to be done, to make a present spiritual use of past corrections: for having learned from them where the main strength of sin lies, where you are most in danger, and where is the stress of what God expects from you. Your business then, as believers, must invariably and constantly be, to watch and contend against such sins; to be strictly upon your guard against such dangerous circumstances; and to be earnestly diligent in all such duties. Thus you will receive the most substantial benefit from your past afflictive dispensations. And when your warfare is finished, and your light increased, as (if you endure

to the end) it soon shall be, then with humble adoration and thankfulness you shall look back on the way by which the Lord led you through your earthly pilgrimage. You shall then perceive and acknowledge that mercy and goodness directed every step. You shall then see that what your shortsighted ignorance once called adversities and evils, were in truth and reality well designed and gracious blessings: that nothing befel you without cause; that no trouble came upon you *sooner*, or pressed you more *heavily*, or continued *longer* with you than your case required.

In a word, you shall then be fully sensible that your many afflictions were each in their place among the means employed by God's wisdom and grace to fit, prepare and bring you to the possession of the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," which the Lord hath prepared for them that love him. Amen.

S E R M O N IV.

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." 2 Pet. ii. 7.

IN these and the following words we have an account from the apostle of the gracious dealings of God with his faithful servant the patriarch Lot; and of the eminent obedience and zeal which so greatly distinguished that righteous man. In seeing and hearing the abominable deeds of the wicked among whom he dwelt, he vexed his righteous soul from day to day; but the Lord was so abundantly gracious toward him, and after he had blessed even this their filthy conversation to his spiritual improvement, he wrought for him a miraculous deliverance from the swift and fearful destruction he sent upon them.

The misery of living in an evil world, is frequently thus a blessed means, used by the great Head of the church for refining and purifying his people: for here in this life,

a scene full of trouble continually appears before the eyes and mind of a gracious soul, since he cannot be insensible either to the sins or calamities of others, or to the dishonor done to God by them every day. Wherefore, not to speak at all at present of what the christian, who is a christian indeed, often meets with in his own person from such an evil world, let us now consider him only as a looker on upon others. It may be highly useful to open a little what he sees in this view, that we may be the better able to discern the uneasiness which arises to his mind from this quarter.

He sees, then, on every side an overflowing flood of iniquity abounding in the world; he can no where cast his eyes but he meets it; the world in which he now lives, agreeable to the truth of God's word, he finds to be (the whole of it taken at large) "a world lying in wickedness." Does he read the history of past ages? what does he find the general account to be, but a succession of pride, ambition, selfishness, lust, covetousness, oppression, cruelty, treachery, and villainy? Does he consider the present day, and will he not find, throughout the

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reach of his own observation, that the face of the world is still marked with the very same characters? self, self-love, and self-interest, he every where sees governing the world, and all conscientious regard due both to God and man, he sees also falling before it. Sin, thus, in contrariety to God and his law, presents itself perpetually before him; he meets it in every place—he hears of little else in the world.

Solomon has laid before us the review he had taken, with much care, of mankind, in his book of Ecclesiastes; and which in truth is a description of what the world then was, and will be to the end of time, under the guidance of a fallen nature. Hear, therefore, his judgment of it, fixing only upon a single point, that of oppressions done under the sun; “And behold, saith he, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter;—on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter;—wherefore I praised the dead, which are already dead, more than the living, which are alive;—yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done

under the sun." Solomon, we may observe, was affected and afflicted with the thought of universal sin and corruption. It carried him into a reflection exceedingly natural to a tender spirit—that it was better far to be out of this world than to be in it; nay, that in this respect the dead were better than the living—yea, he that had never been, than either the one or the other. But that you may see with clearer evidence the foundation of Solomon's remark, and what it is in the sins of the world, which makes them so much a matter of affliction to those who are truly the children of God, I would mention the three following things, which arise out of sin that is in the world, and the view and consideration of which, is ever to the pious soul, matter of real grief and affliction; and,

First, He is grieved for the dishonor done to God, by sin which is in the world; a thing about which others are no way concerned:—yet this we shall find to have been very singularly and remarkably the case of the servants of God recorded in scripture. When the people in the absence of Moses, on the mount, had made them a molten calf,

calf, how was the spirit of that faithful man moved! "As soon as he came near the camp," as the account is in the book of Exodus, "that he saw the calf and the dancing, his anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount." You will see the same spirit in Samuel, respecting the repeated sins of king Saul;—and so in Elijah, when he boldly confronted the priests of Baal: not to mention abundance of expressions of this sort, every where scattered in the book of Psalms. How strongly was this manifest also in Saul and Barnabas, when the people at Lystra were about to do sacrifice to them; "They rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, sirs, why do ye these thing?" And the same temper shewed itself in Paul at Athens; "His spirit was moved within him, when he saw the whole city given to idolatry;" or, as it is in the margin, "full of idols." Nothing so intimately affects the true believer, as the dishonor done to God in the world by sin. This is the language of the believer; "My zeal hath even consumed me, saith David, because mine enemies (where,

(where, observe, he calls them his, because they were the enemies of God) have forgotten God's words :'' while the language of the mere moralist is, " So that I am found in my duty, what care I for the sins of others ?'' This difference is very distinguishing, and I would wish you to observe it carefully. But to proceed,

Secondly, The serious christian is very sensibly grieved for the present misery which sin brings with it, and after it. And indeed, not to multiply words, in this view, the present evils attendant on the sin of Adam, are so many, and these also are so enormously increased by the needless evils which the sin of one and another every day produces ;—the lust of some—the covetousness of others—the ambition of many—and the pride of more ; that no man who is not lost to the feelings of humanity, much less he whose heart is touched by the compassions of God in Christ, can possibly consider them without great sensibility of heart. But again, above all,

Thirdly, A world lying in wickedness is an afflictive sight to a servant of God, because he knows the future ruin in which it
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will and must terminate. St. Paul was carried into extremity of distress at the thought of the lamentable condition his unbelieving countrymen were in; and which he expresses in a manner so awful, deep, and astonishing, that you and I may well take shame to ourselves, to think how little concern we day by day feel over the perishing souls of others. "I say the truth in Christ, saith he, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart; for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* The consideration of the miserable

* No text of scripture, perhaps, has been more generally misunderstood and misinterpreted than this. The current opinion concerning its import is to the following effect:—The apostle, anxious and concerned about the spiritual welfare of his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh, who obstinately rejected Christ, wished himself anathematized or separated from him, if that would be available to retrieve them from their alarming state of alienation from the Lord Jesus, and would tend to promote their eternal salvation. And it is commonly alledged, that the apostle, by proposing to sacrifice his own happiness for the sake of advancing that of others, strikingly evinced himself to be possessed of the same benevolent temper and disposition by which Moses was actuated on a similar occasion, who, making intercession in behalf of the offending Israelites, offered his own life as an atonement to God for their trespass against him. But let it

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state of their souls, and the view he had of the approaching eternal destruction "of them that know not God, and obey not his gospel," begat a heaviness of heart in him, which he most solemnly appeals to God, (for certainly, whatever be the meaning of the passage precisely, thus far is meant) was

be candidly considered, that St. PAUL was not, like Moses, a TYPICAL intercessor; and therefore, to draw any argument from one of those instances in support of the other, is doubtless to reason inconclusively. Besides, he, whose office it was to proclaim the only true atonement already made by Jesus Christ, could not possibly think of himself as a sin-offering or an atonement for others. Such a sentiment, it is supposed, is altogether foreign to the design of the apostle in this place.

Having laid down these positions, I shall now proceed in a more direct manner to give, what appears to me to be, the true import of the passage under consideration; leaving others to judge for themselves, and to espouse what appears in their view, most proper and eligible.

Let the words in the third verse, which may be accurately rendered, FOR I MYSELF WAS WISHING TO BE AN ANATHEMA FROM CHRIST, be read as a parenthesis, and then St. PAUL's lamentation over the Jews will run easily thus: I HAVE GREAT SORROW, AND CONTINUAL HEAVINESS IN MY HEART, () FOR MY BRETHREN ACCORDING TO THE FLESH. Thus the apostle, in the bosom of his lamentation, gives the reason of it, namely, That he beheld with sorrow his kinsmen anathematized from Christ: for the reason of his sorrow is nowhere else intimated in the passage. And he intimates it in such a manner, as to shew, that he is far from glorying over them;—that he was as deeply guilty as any of them;—and that it was in no respect owing to his wish or choice, that he was now happily delivered from that dismal condition wherein he beholds them involved. Ed.

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infinitely great, and such as filled him with continual sorrow. It is indeed a very sensible sorrow, which the children of this world, the sons and daughters of ease, pleasure, and pride, raise and create in the heart of the true child of God. They vex his soul from day to day with their ungodly deeds, while they wilfully refuse and neglect to know the things which belong to their peace, and harden themselves more and more against God's fear, and in the ways of endless damnation. Though such a one cannot prevail with them to turn through grace and repent, (and so much the more because they will not, will not be persuaded) yet he "mourneth in secret places for them;" as did the prophet Ezekiel for the Jews, the good Samuel for Saul, whom the Lord had rejected from being a king.

On all these accounts, sin hath made this world (as all such, I believe, really find it) an uncomfortable place to a real christian. Sin, transgression of the mind of God, even in thought, is what he hates; yet he sees little else around him; and therewith so much sinful dishonour done to God, and so much misery, vexation, and violence brought
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by it, day by day, to man, both here, and he cannot but judge, hereafter, that he finds to continue to live in an evil world, is not the least of his troubles; even what he himself suffers from, not being considered. Wherefore,

Having seen and observed, that living among evil men, is a real affliction to the people of God; it will now be useful to consider it, as a useful means blessed of God for their spiritual good and improvement.

We fools, as I had almost said, are apt to complain, that the world is so sinful and evil, as if we should do better were it not so. The reason, I suppose, is, that we think we should then be rid of many temptations which too often, as it is, give corrupt nature advantage against us. And were there nothing but godly people in the world, how much benefit, are we apt to imagine, should we receive by their means to our souls! O what a happy thing, are we ready to think would it be, were we living in a place where there were none but those who loved God, feared God, served God, believed in Jesus from the heart, obeyed him, and by daily glorifying God in their body and in their spirit.

spirit, which are God's, were abidingly waiting for that joy which shall be revealed in him! Nay, Christ saith, "Let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest: The reason of which may be, that while the good and the bad live together, not only do the bad enjoy the means of reformation, but the good a great means of improvement. And that this present evil world is indeed a great means of a believer's spiritual improvement, of mortifying his corruptions, and strengthening his graces, will appear from these following considerations.

In the first place, Living in an evil world is a great means of trying and exercising true faith. Were you living in a world, where there were none but regenerate people, you would be greatly apt to mistake yourselves; to fancy you had more faith than you really have—and so, when the last enemy, death, should come upon you, you would faint and be discouraged on this side the heavenly country. But when, as it is, you live in an evil world; when you see sin abounding, and your faith is tried and exercised by all the force which custom and countenance

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can give against it; when you often are put to reflect what God will do with all this world of sinners in another life; when you see the ungodly many times in great present prosperity; when you find the number of real christians to be very small, and are daily convinced that they are in truth but a little flock; when, finally, you observe many who had made, perhaps for years, an appearance of being christians, yet at length failing and falling away: This, I say, at one and another time, as occasion offers, brings out the natural state of your hearts, proves whether the foundation of your scriptural belief be well laid—puts you on seeking the grounds of true faith—and forcing you continually to the most vigorous exercise of this grace, confirms you in it. In this very manner you may see the faith of the Psalmist was first exercised, and then improved. He was not aware of the weakness of his faith, till the prosperity of the wicked was in some singular manner brought before him. Then his heart misgave him; “My feet, saith he, were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped.” And why? I was envious at the foolish, I do

do also see the ungodly in such prosperity." When, therefore, he saw thus how easy, happy, secure, and even insolent they were, to what doth this lead him? whereto (so to speak) doth it drive him? He tells us; "I thought, saith he, to understand this; but it was too hard for me, till I went into the sanctuary of God." He betook himself diligently to the ordinances of God, and then by the light of God's statutes his eyes were opened: "Then, saith he, understood I the end of these men; namely, how thou dost set them in slippery places, and callest down and destroyest them." His faith by these means gained strength, and he was helped over a great stumbling block into a more steadfast belief of the promises of God. And in the same manner St. Peter, when stirring up, as he saith, the pure minds of those to whom he wrote by way of remembrance, gives a reason; "That there should be scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" where he sufficiently intimates, both that the conduct of such men would be a trial of their faith, at which they might be apt to stumble; and yet, by their calling to

remembrance the words of scripture, "that so it should be," it should be a means of confirming them. But again,

2. Living in an evil world is a great means of mortifying the love of life, and so leading and engaging the affections to things above. Such as the world is, and full of sin as it is, we in general are but too fond of it. What then would the case be, were the world exactly to our wish, and every one about us just what we desire? Do we know that we have a love of this present world within us? If we do not, what can convince us of it in so striking a manner, as that we are so unwilling to leave it, though we see nothing but sin in it? And when we thus see this love of the world which remains, what can be so suited to mortify it, and to engage us to the search of higher things, as the very sight of the world itself? In fact, the sinfulness of the world hath this effect upon the gracious soul: When the faithful believer reflects upon the evil that is daily done under the sun, and by peculiar circumstances it is brought home to him, he finds an edge, as it were, set upon his desires after God, and that new world in which
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shall dwell righteousness; his soul grows sick of this dungeon and sink of iniquity in which he is confined, and he even loaths himself that he should yet have any value for the things on earth. But again:

3. Living in an evil world is a special means, under grace, of mortifying self-will, and of improving meekness. Were all of that temper and conduct which they ought to be, humble, loving, and condescending, how should we then learn meekness? yea, how could it then be exercised? We should, doubtless, in this case, many times deceive ourselves; and while we enjoyed our own will, be forward to think there was no such thing as gall in us. But an evil world it is, which shews us what spirit we are naturally of; brings us one way or other perpetually to the test; drags out the lurking desire there is still within us, of having in all things our own way; and so becomes an eminent means, in the hands of God, of teaching us what is in the sight of God of great price, namely, a meek and quiet spirit. Had Moses, think you, attained to such eminence in the spirit of meekness, had he not been conversant with so stubborn and obstinate a

people as were the Jews? All their perverse murmurings were but means, in the course of God's providence, of his (Moses), greater watchfulness over his heart, and, through grace, of his gaining greater victory over himself.

Upon the whole of this matter, (for it is time to bring the subject to a close) as many of you as walk by faith, and are led by the Spirit of God, will find yourselves in this world, as Lot was in Sodom. You will inwardly and at heart grieved for the sin which is committed under the sun; mourn for the horrid dishonor that is done by it to God; feel for the present misery it occasions, and, above all, for that tremendous future ruin to which it leads. But while you are giving these well-grounded proofs of a heart renewed by grace, let me warn you, Be abidingly watchful to keep your own garments unspotted from the evil of this apostate world; earnestly implore the grace of God, that what you see of the wickedness and misery of men, may turn to your spiritual good and improvement; and may be made a means, through grace, to confirm your faith, engage your love and affection

affection to heavenly things, and daily improve the spirit of meekness in you. And let what you have now heard especially, serve in some degree to discover to you the "depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" to admire and adore, I say, the wisdom of God in all; to reconcile you to your lot in a sinful and perverse generation; and to make you abidingly sensible of his inexpressible love, who makes even the sins of others turn to the spiritual and eternal good account of his servants. Amen.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N V.

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”
2 Cor. iv. 17.

ST. Paul is in this place comforting himself and the christians at Corinth, by laying before them the blessed fruits and glorious consequences of their sufferings in the cause of the gospel of Christ. “For our light affliction, saith he, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” But now, how do afflictions work this effect? Why, they do so, not only on account of the peculiar promises which are made to the suffering believer, but also in respect to the influence which these afflictions now have, through grace, upon him, to sanctify, refine, and fit him for the heavenly habitation of glory. Sufferings of every kind are special instruments in this great work. As the refiner puts his precious ore into the fire, and there, as it were, tortues it to purge it from
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from its dross; so doth Christ by his beloved people. He brings them, as need and necessity is, to the furnace of affliction, and there cleanses away their impurities, sanctifies their hearts, and advances them in the power of godliness. And in this great work, persecution for righteousness sake is one great and excellent means. But in speaking to this subject, it may be proper to observe,

First, what is meant by persecution. Observe, therefore, that to persecute is to pursue and injure another, in word or deed, by fraud or force, secretly or openly, for religion or righteousness sake. The nature of persecution, observe carefully, lies not in the measure of suffering, but in this, that what is suffered is for religion or righteousness sake. So that persecution is not confined to the taking away of life, or some great spoiling of goods or estate; for so the word of God should not be true, that "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution:" since there are doubtless many who never have been called to these more interesting sufferings, who yet nevertheless, for the sake of a good conscience, have

have one way or other been made partakers of Christ's sufferings, whether by reproach, or ridicule, or other injurious treatment. Yet, on the other hand, it is fit I observe, Let no man think himself persecuted, if by the humour or inventions of his own brain (in short, if by any thing he undertakes without the warrant of God's word), he brings himself into difficulties. No; if we make our own cross, we must bear our own burden. It is only when refusing to hearken to men rather than God, we bring them upon us, that we may properly be said to suffer persecution. But,

Secondly, We may also observe, that persecution is in one shape or other, in this world, the lot of all God's children. This appears most expressly from the scripture already alledged; "All," it is said, of whatever age or country, "that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution;" and which in fact has been true from the beginning of the world, as appears throughout the church history—from Abel to the time of Christ and his apostles. As in the days of Abraham, "he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after

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the spirit," so it was in the days of the apostles ; and so it is now. It may indeed at first sight seem somewhat strange, that not a single soul should be able to serve God faithfully without bringing the world upon him for it. For you will be ready to say, perhaps, " how is the world so wicked, as to hate men only for loving God ? especially when their loving God brings upon the world no manner of positive damage ? " The world, however wicked, cares not to own it hates any only for serving God ; nay, for the most part, so alienated are we from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in us, I verily believe it knows not that it hates them on that special account. It knows it not, because it knows not the scriptures ; it knows not God. But so it is, notwithstanding, and so God and Christ expressly tell us ; " The carnal mind, saith the Spirit, by the mouth of the apostle, is enmity against God." And accordingly, this natural enmity desperately rising up at the sight of any who are like God, and moving the heart into displeasure against them, it presently finds some colour of blame in them ; under which colour, the malignity of the

the heart still screening itself perhaps from the notice, even of those it possesses, it eagerly takes hold of that imaginary pretence, and so sets itself deliberately to discouragement, and by various methods of banter, ridicule, reproach, reviling, or worse treatment, to persecute the friends of God. All which, that it is and will be so, remarkably also, Christ himself confirms; "If ye were of the world, saith Christ, the world loveth its own; but because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore," continues he, (for that very reason it is, and no other whether the world doth or doth not know or consider it), "doth the world hate you." There is, therefore, such a motive or passion for persecution in the heart of fallen man, that what is instanced by scripture example, and determined by scripture declaration, is manifest in real fact, from the inveteracy of fallen nature, and its aversion naturally to true religion; and unless the whole world should become godly, to suffer for righteousness sake, after one or other sort, must be the lot of the children of God. And I verily believe accordingly, that there never was upon earth a faithful servant of

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God, but at one time or other he experienced something of it. But,

Thirdly, For the comfort of the servants of God, let it be observed, that all their sufferings are in the hand of God. God does not give them up to be a prey to the will of their enemies. He lets the world loose upon them, it may be, but then it is in measure, and always under his own direction; and when he doth even suffer them to be tempted, it is always, (I am speaking, observe, of true, not false, believers) as they can bear; himself standing by, and making them a way to escape. Upon this doctrine our Lord again and again insists; "I say unto you, my friends, saith he, be not afraid of them that kill the body; are not five sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them is forgotten before God? but even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore," (observe again, he is speaking of his friends or faithful followers) "ye are of more value than many sparrows." And of what he thus speaketh he was also himself an example: "Him," saith St. Peter, in his first sermon to the Jews, "being delivered by the deter-

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minate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain:" and which was the very thing Christ had before declared unto Pilate; "Thou couldest, saith he, have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above." Wherefore, if to suffer for righteousness sake, is the lot of God's children, and what they suffer this way is under God's immediate direction, then it must necessarily follow, that two will be against

In the fourth place, Such sufferings are means of doing them good—of their spiritual good and improvement—of purging away their corruptions, and of exalting still their graces. And this it usually doth in the following ways or respects:

1. Sufferings for righteousness sake are means of purifying God's people, as they continue to mortify in them the love of worldly ease. It is not the unregenerate only who have that desire of ease, which our Lord so strongly expresses in the words "Soul, take thine ease," &c. which, tho' in the full sense of them, they belong only, or chiefly, to the children of this world, yet they describe a state which the servants

Christ themselves, through the remainder of sin and corruption, are but too fond of. To have every one about us obliging, agreeable, and ready to gratify our humour; to have nothing to trouble us, or to put us any thing out of our way; to be possessed at least of what we think we need, so as to be able to sit down in quiet, and without being under obligations or difficulties; who will say or think, who, I mean, who knows any thing of his own heart, that this is not a state he is fond of? And this, although he may know, perhaps, (for there lies the danger of it to the true believer), that it peculiarly tends to give him an undue attachment to the present life. Our church has beautifully instructed us to fear in such circumstances, when it teaches us to pray, that God would vouchsafe to "deliver us in all time of our wealth;" that we may not, that is, as is natural, forget ourselves, and grow reconciled to the world in any such easy circumstances. And indeed, how much reason there is that we should thus fear and pray, is sufficiently evident from the care which we find in scripture, God hath usually taken with his people, by a great variety of

disappointments, to preserve them from the infection of worldly ease: but then, no affliction seems so directly calculated for this purpose, because none is so lasting, as the discountenance, the dislike, and displeasure of the world, for righteousness sake. Could such a one as St. Paul, think you, once think of worldly ease? And why not? Because he knew, he tells us, "that afflictions did every where abide him." He had suffered much, he says, and looking forward, he was expecting to "fill up what was behind of the sufferings of Christ." A Christian must one way or other part with his ease, for the contrary temper and conduct of the world will not permit him to keep it; neither is it possible closely to follow Christ, without sacrificing a variety of things which make life easy, and without enduring such things from the world, as greatly disappoint the love of ease, and daily diminish and even extinguish all hope of continuance in it. The least thing that falls under the name of persecution, the very coolness of friends, daily mockery, and daily reproach, disconcert, from the very foundation, the plan of worldly enjoyment, and cause every expectation

tation of it to be utterly fruitless. "Now when such and such a trial is over, the believer is ready to say, I shall be easy: But when experience hath taught him, that he hath still made a wrong calculation, and that trials still remain behind, he renounces at length the hope of present ease, and with every act of self-denial, becomes willing to take up his cross. But again,

2. Sufferings for righteousness sake are means of advancing God's people in holiness, as they mortify the love of worldly esteem. This every one knows, who knows but a little of himself, is one among the chief of those enemies to the power and practice of true religion, which harbor still within us. To love the praise of men more than the praise of God; to be biassed thence in conduct, from what is strictly after the mind of God, to that which is of good report in the world, is what we see daily; nay, is what, it is much to be feared, we all too much feel, and are in some measure influenced by. And if it be thus with a christian, while the world in affection and report is against him; what would it be, did his religion and worldly reputation grow together?

and the better he was, the more he should be esteemed and regarded? "Wo unto you, faith Christ, when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers unto the false prophets." "They preached unto them, as faith the prophet, smooth things," and so obtained their good words. But if a man will take such methods to get the good word of the world, Christ you see, expressly pronounces a woe against him. "Wo unto you!" Why then? Not simply because the world speaks well of you; but because you cause them to do so, by a conduct which is in conformity with the world; whence it follows, and is true in fact, that when a man's conduct is not in conformity with the world, but he walks as Christ also walked; then "the servant shall be as his master," and the men of the world will not speak well of him; he will lose his worldly favor. But then, when on this account, he sincerely and honestly, inherits the woe of the world, he then, on the other hand, obtains the blessing of Christ; for so are the words of the blessing expressly, "Blessed are ye, when men shall speak all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding

exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven ;" that is, in the kingdom of grace here, and of glory hereafter. "In that of glory, you will say, the case is manifest ; but how in that of grace ?" Why, besides that our advancement in glory follows our advancement in grace, besides this, I say, as we see and find we cannot keep man's esteem, with a good conscience to Godward, we shall be the more ready to part with it ; and the soul being injured to reproach, will grow the more content to suffer it. But again,

3. Suffering for righteousness sake is a great means of exercising faith and trust in God, and thence of purifying the heart. It is said, "Cursed is the man that putteth his trust in man, and maketh man his help, and in his heart departeth from the Lord." And this is a word from God which comes indeed very near us ; both striking at the root of all worldly dependence, and condemning us utterly as far as we do omit to put our whole trust in God. The words describe, in the strongest manner, the very heart of a worldling, who knows no other safety than in worldly supports and confi-
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dences. But what then, is the child of God so clean escaped from all worldly trust, as purely to live by faith? or in this respect does he not daily pray, and has he not daily need, that his faith may be daily increased? Well, we know that God hears the prayers of his servants; and how then doth he frequently answer this prayer of their's? Why, abundantly he often permits them to suffer for his name's sake; your worldly reputation is taken away; your worldly interest is struck at: What can you do? you perceive your help is in God; you fly to him. As surely as you faithfully do so, he gives you strength, deliverance, or, what is better, he gives you comfort. So, by perpetual discipline, our faith in God strengthens, and worldly trust dies away. Suffering for Christ and the gospel's sake, signally shews a man his worldly confidence; his dependence on the arm of flesh; his willingness to have something in hand, and not trust God for all; and the cleaving of his heart to the world. And as through grace, it shews him this, so it brings him, through the same grace, to humble himself before God for this his distrust; to cry for a greater measure of confidence in him and

and consequently, to be more strongly and truly united to him! But again once more,

4. Suffering for righteousness sake quickens the grace of hope. Where could an apostle find comfort in persecution, but "in the joy set before him?" or, do you judge St. Paul would have had his conversation so much in heaven, had it not been that his enemies forced him continually to look thither for present support? "Our light affliction, saith he, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." You see here where his eyes were fixed, and what it was that engaged him so attentively to have in view the heavenly kingdom. And you see farther, that by many troubles, being repeatedly driven to consider his better hope, he was taught to make little account of his really heavy afflictions; to esteem them to be light, and to speak of them as if they were nothing.

But what, hath God no other children than his chosen apostles? Nay, but "such honor have all his saints." He puts them all, as it were, into the furnace; suffers the world to rise up against them; chides and excites their sluggish affections; shews them they

they are not while in the body, at home makes them sensible that this is not their rest; leaves them in many cases little or no quiet; constrains them to be looking forward; convinces them that they are but strangers upon earth; and forces them to seek the better country. He more and more obliges them to fix their hearts on those "treasures which wax not old, which are eternal in the heavens;" and abundantly to expect and long after that new heaven and new earth, in which alone dwelleth, or shall continue to dwell, righteousness.

Upon the whole of this matter, you may evidently see, how, and in what manner, suffering for religion's sake is a means chiefly blessed of God for cleansing and purifying his people. Learn you from it, whose "hope maketh not ashamed, because," as saith St. Paul in this case, "the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto you." Learn you, I say, from it, not to let your hearts faint, or your hands hang down in any case; seeing God so wonderfully ordereth all things concerning you, as to make all things, even the most unfavourable, even things evil and sinful, "to work for our good." Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N VI.

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."
James i. 12.

THE apostle sets before us in these words, the happy consequences of well-endured and sanctified temptations. The crown of endless glory is the assured portion of all those who faithfully follow their victorious Captain through great temptations, and stand proof against the fiery trial. Their faith being put into the furnace, and found steady, unshaken, and firm, shall be precious in God's sight, and shall be honored at his second appearing.

But if such be the issue of the temptations of God's people, according to his promise, then surely he permits them to be tempted for wise and gracious purposes, and turns their temptations to their real good. It is in this view at present, I wish to speak of this subject, and to consider how and in what

what manner the great Head of the church makes use of temptations, to promote the sanctification of his people.

Temptation bears in scripture various significations. One time it signifies God tempting or trying man, as he did Abraham to prove and manifest the grace that is in him. At another time it signifies man tempting God, either by distrust, which was the great sin of the Israelites in the wilderness, or by presumption, the sin to which the arch enemy, satan, tempted our Saviour. "If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down," &c. And then again it sometimes signifies, the suggestions of satan, and the enticements of our own lusts. It is in the two latter senses that I now propose to speak of temptation; with a view more expressly of shewing, that even by the suggestions of satan, and the enticements of lust, Christ takes occasion to advance his people in holiness.

But now here, since it is most certain that the flesh is perpetually lusting against the spirit, by sending up its sinful motions into the mind; and since also, it is no less certain that the devil is alike busy, either working

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with, exciting and enflaming the motions of lust, or injecting into the mind such monstrous thoughts, as evidently shew whence they come or arise. Since, I say, these two enemies unquestionably work together in the matter of temptation, it will for that reason be improper to consider them so distinctly, as if in every temptation they had not both a share. And yet again, since the fact is, that in some temptations the devil, and in others the flesh bears the principal share, it will for that reason be advisable not altogether to mix and confound them. Wherefore, while speaking, as my intention is, of temptations the most afflictive and grievous, it seems best to confine ourselves to one single point, temptation to despair; this being a temptation, in which there is indeed a working together (as we are speaking) of the devil and the flesh; and yet, as the case is, sometimes the one, and at other times the other of them, seeming to bear the principal part.

Now you will carefully understand, that all temptations to despair work upon, and by, two special lusts of the flesh, namely, pride and unbelief; the former of which by
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murmuring, and the latter by doubting, gives occasion to impatience, discouragement, heartlessness, and so despair. When pride and unbelief are set together at work, whether by their own natural actings in certain cases of soul, with a more covered attempt of the devil, or whether they are moved and excited by a more bold and open assault of the adversary; then in either case there is a temptation to despair. And what I mean to shew, is, that Christ takes advantage even of such very grievous temptations to do his faithful people service; to mortify their corruptions; to confirm their graces, and to establish them to himself, a holy and peculiar people. So unsearchable are God's ways, that his very worst enemies are made use of by him to help forward his work, and that, by their very endeavours to hinder and overthrow it. Wherefore, let us now mention a case or two of temptation to despair in this view lying before us.

First, The faithful servants of Christ may sometimes be brought into much trouble of mind, because, and on account of their sins. They can see nothing in them as it ought to be; they are grievous sinners; and so full

of corruption, that they do nothing at all as they should; they are therefore exceedingly discouraged, their hearts faint within them, they have no hope of mercy present with their spirits, every thing, it seems, is against them, neither does there appear any method or way of escape. Now in this heaviness of spirit because of sin, there is a secret, but stubborn rising of self-righteous pride, manifesting itself in various circumstances, tending all to despair; such as bitter anger, repining that we are thus and thus; a fullness, like that of a person disappointed, because we cannot be as we would; a desperate wilfulness in complaining and refusing comfort; together with an aptness to fly in the face of God, and say, as it were, "Why hast thou thus dealt? or why dost thou deal thus with me?" And with these peevish and violent workings of pride, the devil joins at the same time with all his force; representing every thing in the most discouraging light; and insinuating, that there is little or no prospect of things ever being better. In the mean time, unbelief also is raging; deliverance seems hardly possible; all the means of it appear

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insufficient;

insufficient; so many things stand in the way; such corruptions within, such difficulties without, such guilt behind, the soul is ready to sink under the burden; almost determined to give all over for lost. In short, at such seasons, all seems driving on to despair, under the conduct of pride, unbelief, and satan. Such seasons there are with many, who (where the gospel is faithfully preached and received) are seriously seeking the salvation of their souls. Indeed it does not appear how any can be safe from them, while pride and unbelief are in us all, and the devil is so ready at hand, as the scriptures assure us he is, to work with them. Neither is it conceivable how a sincere soul should be at all times free from this vexation, but by being kept under the power of grace in daily deep humility, and lively exercises of faith. It is through the defect of these, that many have been kept in the distress I have been describing, for years together; and that some in peculiar circumstances have felt inexpressible torment of soul.

This is one temptation to despair. I will add a second, namely, Horrid suggestions from the devil. Now this is a temptation which

which has its force, partly in the same pride and unbelief, and partly in ignorance. The devil takes the soul sometimes by the advantage of the former temptation, and when the mind is oppressed with the formidable apprehensions already mentioned, adds to them his own most fearful suggestions; consisting of black and monstrous things respecting God; his design in them being to urge on farther towards despair, and when he can, to violent purposes. This he does at some times. But at other times, he avails himself, of the ignorance of sincere people, forcing in upon the mind the most absurd and monstrously wicked imaginations; at which they, either mistaking for their own thoughts, or taking to be their own sins, are miserably affrighted; and they are often also driven by them to a degree of distress, which deprives them almost of their senses, and leaves them under inexpressible anguish, and the deepest discouragement of soul. It is pride, unbelief, and ignorance, by which the devil obtains opportunity of casting in these dark suggestions, and of raising by them such a storm of trouble in the soul, as none but they, who have felt it are able even

to conceive. Now whether the devil takes hold of pride and unbelief already set at work in the heart, to graft his suggestions upon them; or whether he takes advantage of our ignorance, to stir up natural pride and unbelief, and so put them into action, the matter is nearly the same. Pride grows impatient, and faith being weak lays little restraint upon it; for the soul is all in an uproar; peace is quite banished, and every thing seems rushing to the very brink of despair.

Such are the temptations under consideration. In which, and as to which, however Christ be dishonoured by hard thoughts, (through the prevalency of pride and unbelief for the present) yet he doth not forsake his distressed people; but he still keeps their faith from utterly failing, while to their own sense and feeling it is quite gone; most wonderfully supporting them, they know not how, and exercising them with such peculiar and critical dispensations of providence and grace, as to themselves are most astonishing on after and cool reflection. But is this all? Does he no more than preserve and support them? Can you think he

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thus lets Satan, with his two blackest furies, pride and unbelief, loose upon them without some gracious purpose? No; he makes this also, and many times this very especially, to work for their good. But how so, you may probably ask? Why,

1. He takes occasion, by these temptations, very much to humble the hearts of those who are exercised by them. They grow more sensible, perhaps, than any other persons whatsoever, of their exceeding sinfulness, and are laid lower abundantly before God. They are peculiarly afraid of sin, and have singularly awful apprehensions of the wrath and displeasure of God; they own, in a very experimental and practical manner, their own insufficiency and weakness; and are jealous of doing any the least thing by which they might grieve the Holy Spirit, and provoke their Preserver to leave them to themselves. Again,

2. Their Lord takes occasion by these temptations, to let them see the pride, unbelief, and self-will that is in them; and which, undiscovered, would neither be lamented nor mortified. Before this, they

knew not, it may be, that they had so much of these base mixtures in them, or did not well know what unbelief meant. These are deep spiritual iniquities in the soul, which lie in general far out of sight, and require some smart discipline to bring them out to force them, I say, to shew themselves in their true colours, as to be what in truth they are, the most obstinate and pestilent sins in the nature of man. Before such temptations, such pride, unbelief, and self-will were not, it may be suspected, and the person at least thought himself on a tolerable footing respecting them. But when in such temptations, they have made their true and proper appearance, and the effects of them have been found so exceedingly desperate; then their malignity and obstinacy are made manifest; the residence of them in the heart is noted; they are lamented, resisted, contended against in the spirit of hearty repentance and prayer, as being what indeed they are, the greatest and vilest of all our sins. But yet again,

3. The Lord Christ takes occasion by these temptations, abundantly to engage the hearts of those who have been exercised by them.

to an esteem and value for the gospel. They are taught by their troubles to see what others perhaps only talk of, namely, "that their help alone standeth in the name of the Lord who hath made heaven and earth; that other help is all in vain; and that there is but one way of salvation for them," even in "Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life." They are taught by a dear-bought experience the worth of a dying exalted Redeemer; they see they are all laid up in his hands; they rejoice, and again rejoice that they are found in such safe keeping; they say with transport of spirit, "This is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us." And again,

4. Christ takes occasion by these temptations, to kill in them earthly affections. They have been driven to straights, out of which, they plainly perceive, the wealth of the world could no way help them; in which all the pride of life could not one jot refresh them; and under which, all pleasure must be lighter than vanity, and a very burden. To talk to them of comfort from worldly things, in the day of their calamity, were the same thing, as to attempt to force back a storm.

form with the breath of your mouth. Then they felt what others for the most part only own,—the vanity of the world; and what they then felt they lo remember, as to make it indeed thenceforward their great care, to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Let who will take the honours, pleasures, and pomps of this life, they desire only to do their several duties in the world, while God leaves them in it. In short, not out of peevish or sullen discontent, but upon free and deliberate choice, upon fair trial, and firm experience, they refuse “the things which are seen, and are temporal, and choole the things which are not seen, and eternal.” And yet, once more,

5. The Lord Christ takes occasion by these temptations, to improve in those who are tried by them, a blessed spirit of meekness. Self-will hath, as it were, done its worst, and spent itself, and the whole spirit is now become more gentle and mild, and manageable. The creature hath learnt to be submissive under the hand of providence, quiet when God strikes him, and ready to render up what God calls for. He is more subject

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also to divine guidance, respecting his concerns of a spiritual nature; he acquiesces with God's dispensations of his spirit; and waits with patience the mortification of sin, and the growth of grace. He has more also of gentleness in his conduct towards others. Like his blessed Master, he is not forward to open his mouth; he rather takes or suffers wrong; yields his own way and humour to others; and is in all things kind and condescending. In short, the edge of his natural self-willedness is taken away; the height of his lofty looks is brought low; the unruliness of his spirit is broken; his spiritual troubles have helped him forward in true and genuine meekness.

Thus you see, or may see, how, or in what manner, Christ turns the devices of the enemies of his people upon themselves; and from the whole of what hath been said, we may make this plain remark; namely, That since it is in the pride and unbelief of our hearts, that these grievous temptations have their main foundation, our business, as christians, is, to improve and have a humble sense of ourselves, and a lively sense of God's mercies towards us in Christ; by which alone

alone it shall come to pass, that we shall be preserved from sinning when we are thus tempted, or be in the way of receiving blessing from or by the temptation itself.

It may not be proper to dismiss a discourse of this sort without remarking, that the temptations you have heard described, are not the effect of what people are apt to call melancholy; a term indeed now-a-days very liberally bestowed on all true and serious religion. If a man is brought to a right use of his reasonable faculties, and because he is sure there is a future state at hand, he himself to seek it in the only way in which it can be obtained—by faith in Christ, and endeavours to live according to the precepts of his gospel, presently the cry is, "This man is melancholy; he is always reading the bible; he talks of nothing but the scriptures." Ah! would God I could see you seized with this melancholy, if it must be called! I am sure it would bring you much joy and peace in the end. But some of you will say, perhaps, No; we do not think a man melancholy for being a sober, serious christian; but you will not deny, that what you have been describing is not very comfortable.

fortable. True, but what then? Is christianity a warfare, or is it not? If it is not, then God is a liar, and God's word is a lie, from one end to the other; but if christianity be a warfare, then where is the wonder that the christian warrior should still have enemies to fight with? or that these should bring him into troubles? What think you? Did not "the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs," find it so? How then can you cast blame on christianity, because it engages men to fight? or how can you raise objections to the gospel life, because there are enemies in the way, (the very thing he is taught in God's word to expect) who bring the christian soldier into straits and difficulties? or why will you call that madness or melancholy, which is but the genuine consequence of a man's having to deal, (as, if the bible be true, every christian hath) with spiritual, yet real enemies, who are expert, active, malicious, yet most powerful? The truth and fact is, they who talk at this rate are the very persons who, in outward profession, "being harnessed," as David says, "and carrying bows, turn themselves back in

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the day of battle." They know they ought, but they know also they dare not look the world, the flesh, and the devil in the face, in the cause of Christ. In this case, then, judge, I pray you, how the great Captain of salvation will receive you at the last day; you, I say, who, though you have called yourselves his, have yet given up his cause into the hands of his enemies! Oh, in the name of God, let us look forward to that day, when "they that sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Amen.

S E R M O N . VII.

“ By faith Abraham when he was tempted, offered up Isaac : And he that received the promises offered up his only-begotten son,” Heb. xi. 17.

IN the history to which these words refer, we find the Almighty giving out an injunction to the patriarch Abraham, of a very singular, and to natural apprehension a very astonishing nature ; no less than to imbrue his hands in the blood of his only Son, and to offer him up for a burnt-offering. Now we, as reasonable creatures, can no otherwise account for this extraordinary command, or reconcile it with the perfections of God, than by supposing that he meant to illustrate by it the obedience, and to advance the spiritual good of his servant ; and accordingly we find it. So “ Abraham being proved was found faithful.” By this trial his faith in God was abundantly confirmed ; he gave the glory to God by it, and God was highly glorified in him.

This is the point I now have in view

from these words ; even to shew, that by searching trials of the graces of his people it is, that the Head of the church greatly purifies and exalts them in holiness. By putting the grace that is in us to trial, he very highly improves it, and by this subdues the influence of corrupt nature. It may be proper to exemplify this in some special instances : As,

First, He sometimes brings the believer into sharp trials of his faith, that by them he may the more disengage his heart from the love of worldly things. In proof of which, the story of Abraham before us directly presents itself to us.

Isaac was the child of the promise, the very child with whom God had declared he would establish the covenant he had made with Abraham. This, I say, was the very word of the promise a year before the child was born ; neither could Abraham so much as think, that in another Isaac whom God might give him, there should be a restoring of the promise and covenant ; for he knew that the promise was made, and the covenant after him intailed on this very Isaac, who should be born unto him at the set time

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next year: the proof, therefore, to which Abraham's faith was called was no other than this; namely, that he should believe God would, because he had said so, make that very Isaac whom he was about to sacrifice the heir of promise; the very person by whom God would make Abraham and Sarah the father and mother of nations.

Now this, it must be owned, was putting his faith to the proof indeed! For how great was this seeming impossibility! "Isaac," might Abraham well suggest to himself, "is to be the father of many nations, yet now I am by the command of God, to put him to death;" but he accounted, say the scriptures, "that God was able to raise him up even from the dead;" and without doubt, therefore, he expected that he would do so, because he knew, and was firmly persuaded, that God's word must stand; he put his hand therefore, with a degree even of cheerfulness, to the knife to slay his only beloved son.

But what, you will say again, could possibly be God's design in this? Why, he tells us himself, "it was to *tempt* Abraham;" that is to try and prove him. But was this,

you will say again, any mark of God's love to Abraham? Affuredly it was. Abraham was the father of the faithful; he must therefore be, and he was, a most eminent example of faith. So God, by a variety of discipline, wrought up this grace of faith in him to an amazing height; but in no instance did the power of the spirit work so mightily upon him, as in this last trial, which was a noble conclusion of his extraordinary life. By this last trial his faith was exalted to the fullest assurance; to a pitch, it is plain, to which it had not yet risen, as appears by his fear not long before forcing him to the practice of a downright lie in Egypt, and by his sinful unbelief, when God first made known to him his purpose of giving him a child by Sarah.

The love of life and the love of ease had their place in Abraham, as well as others; he had unbelief to master as well as we; and you must also believe him more than man, if you imagine the command he had to sacrifice his son, did not put his faith in God, as well as his parental tenderness to the fullest proof, and raise such objections on the side of nature, as made the trial as necessary for

for his own soul as it was for the glory of divine grace.

But is Abraham singular in this? is our faith for instance so strong, as to have excluded all doubt, in all and in every case? And is the object of it, the blessed God, so near and dear to our hearts, as to have disengaged us (the best of us) from all creature love? Need we not also, if we know anything yet as we ought to know, that our faith should be proved and put to those trials, which, by co-operating grace, might strengthen, advance, and exalt us to greater victory over the world? We certainly have need of it, and we certainly also, if we are Christ's people, have in various measures received such gracious trials.

Look back, believers, and you will see in your ordinary course, that from the world, and the things of it, a perpetual succession of trials have arisen to you, which have shewn you your unbelief, your secret respect to present considerations; under which, nothing but grace quickening your faith in God, and your faithfulness to him, could give you any support; and by the continual and unavoidable exercise of which, you have
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found increase in those happy and divine dispositions of heart : And your case also as faithful believers must be very peculiar, if you have not at one time or other been called to extraordinary trials of faith in the way of your duty. If you have known seasons not unlike this of Abraham, when God's command lay heavy upon you, driving you to such a strait, that you must either renounce Christ, or the love of your worldly ease, interest, reputation, character, or something or other which is as the darling of your natural heart. But again, to the point in view,

Secondly, Christ sometimes puts us upon such proofs of our faith, as wonderfully disengages us from the fear of man. There was plainly a great deal of the fear of man in the heart of Moses ; perhaps a great deal more than he thought of, when the Lord appeared unto him to send him to Egypt in order to bring out God's people and his brethren from their slavery there. This you may see at large in the third and fourth chapter of the book of Exodus. Yet what was the issue ? Why, at length how bold was Moses become to look Pharaoh in the face to deliver God's message, and to demand
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his submission to it. And what then should be the reason of this great change? What should render him, who before was so sinfully backward at God's command, by and by so undaunted, as, in the language of scripture, "not to be afraid at the wrath of the king?" Why, the one only reason was, his faith was increased and strengthened. God had work for him to do; he orders him to do it; Moses durst not, as the wicked, disobey; but his faith was weak; he had no great courage to go; he went, however, trembling; faith got the better of fear, and in the end so strangely prevailed, that Moses became bold as a lion.

Now, therefore, will any man say, that this severe trial of his faith was not a great blessing to Moses? Or, if he had not been brought into it, that he would not have remained of the same fearful spirit that caused him at first to fly from Egypt? yet when he was called to go to so great a man as Pharoah, to carry a message so disagreeable to him, and therefore so dangerous to the messenger, he found, I say, great pleadings in his heart against it; without question he found himself disputing; "Why should I be sent on this

this errand rather than another? Here am I at present far enough out of harms way; and why must I be the person that must be thrust into such a business as this?" No doubt also he was wishing earnestly to be excused; and this indeed appears from the pretences he made: "Who am I, saith he to God, that I should go unto Pharaoh, that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" No sooner is this pretence answered, than he instantly proposes another: "They will not believe me, saith he, nor hearken unto my voice." And when that also is silenced, still he hath another at hand: "I am not fit for the work, saith he, I am slow of speech and of slow tongue." And when neither that can be admitted, out he comes (so to speak) very bluntly with, "Oh, my Lord, send I pray thee by the hand of him whom thou wilt send." The sense is, "any body rather than me, I do not care to go, send therefore by some other."

Now say, had the good Lord taken him at his word, what had Moses gotten by it? or what would have helped him over the sinful fears of his own heart? Why, nothing is clearer

clearer to those who have the knowledge of God, than that Moses in this case would have forsaken his own mercies: he would, I say, if God would have suffered him, have forsaken his own mercies: but since the command of God was peremptory, and God would not discharge him from it, he had grace enough to go, in which he shewed himself the servant of God, though it was, you find, with trembling. And you have heard in the issue how wonderfully this proof and exercise of his faith wrought to the abundant sanctification of his heart from slavish fear.

And now I leave you to yourselves to judge, as many of you I mean as have acquaintance with a work of grace within you, whether when you have been called to self-denying duty of superior moment, you have not found the fears of Moses, and the very same pleadings in your hearts which he made before God? I would ask further also, whether these fears have not sometimes so far prevailed, as to cause you in some sort to decline duty? And when they have, whether you have not in conscience been unfaithful to your own souls by such disobedience,

obedience, encouraging unbelief in you. Whereas when conscience stood fast, and you have gone to duty (no matter with how much fear and trembling), you have then infallibly gained a victory over yourself; faith hath gained ground, and fear hath lost it; and that so much the more as the trial hath been severe and pressing. And thus it is, that by the care and love of Christ, his people have always their reward in their labour; for the duty they do, he is sure to pay them thus in hand, and he always so orders it, that his glory and their interest go forward together.

What hath been now shewn concerning the love of the creature, and the fear of man, might be made appear with like evidence in all other cases; but I will mention one other instance only, in which the being brought to trying duties must promote our growth in grace; and that is,

Thirdly, That it is a signal means of mortifying the love of man's esteem. We all naturally "love the praise of men more than the praise of God." Nay, and when renewed, there it a sad hankering within us after the esteem of men. Whoever knows
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any thing, under grace, of his own heart, knows this: He perfectly knows, I say, for instance, that he does not at all want to make a shew of religion, (as a world at enmity against God will call all real profession of Christ) but that were he to hearken to his own heart's suggestions, he would surely hide it through shame, and so keep fair with those that are not yet friends to real and vital christianity. But Christ will not have the matter to lie here; every one professing themselves to be his, shall one time or other be brought to own or disown him. At one time or other therefore, he brings all who are his to a point. "Here, saith he, is my kingdom;" let the world know by your conduct that you belong to it. Here are my people; acknowledge, own, and love them. What answer do you make? Are you against us or for us? Nay but if you forbear to own us through shame, we are not to enquire, you are against us. Oh! here, alas, how many fail! Is it not so? Is it not a common case, that many would more openly own Christ, but that they are ashamed to do so? I doubt not, I doubt not, but many a conscience here, is even

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now bearing testimony to the truth of this. They would endeavour and aim to walk in Christ, as they have him for example; but they are ashamed, they dare not; they know their case is bad, but what can they do? they dare not at present; they think hereafter, and in other circumstances they shall do better; they shall not be so much laughed at, or shall not so much need to mind it if they are.

Thus they deceive, and continue to deceive their own souls; they come near to the kingdom of God, but do not enter into it; and will not go to heaven, unless they can carry the esteem of the world along with them. But this, praised be the grace of God, is not the case of all: the truly humbled, however they feel, will not yield to their shame, but since it is their duty to own Christ, they will do it, let what shame, or whatsoever reproach will follow. They will, I say, own him, but do not mistake here, I do not mean by owning, talking about religion, or prating about Christ, but what I mean is, they will do what he bids them, however particular, or however singular it makes them, they will follow him, and
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not the customs and ways of the world; and they will abstain from all practices which bring dishonour on him, and give offence to his people. This the souls truly humbled by the power of grace will do, and they will not be beaten out of it, by all the authority of custom on the one hand, nor by all the ridicule, shame, or reproach with which you can load them on the other.

Now these, the Bible declare are Christ's true disciples; they own or confess Christ before men; and they have Christ's express promise, that he will therefore confess or own them before his Father which is in heaven. But yet in the mean time, they frequently find, notwithstanding, a secret and undue desire after worldly esteem; are charging themselves daily with it, and praying earnestly for deliverance from it. Well, and Christ certainly hears them. And how then, think you, doth he answer their prayers, and set their souls in a larger room? Why, times ninety-nine out of a hundred, he calls on them to make a more open profession; he brings them into difficult circumstances, where they cannot decline it with any good conscience. He bids them come

forth and come forward; and makes them sensible there is no drawing back, though their hearts perhaps ardently long to have it so. In this great strait they call on him for help; he strengthens them—they do not deny him—and what is the issue? even this, they find the esteem of the world in greater subjection; and they are enabled to act more and more in the spirit of the apostle, “not in any way ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”

Doubtless all this is so. As grace is improved, so corruption is mortified by stricter discipline. And while some may strangely think that they have no shame for Christ, because in truth they have never made any profession of his name, others may take to themselves this comfort; that the more shame they suffer for Christ without, the less powerful abundantly will the dread of it be within.

Thus then does the Head of the church make trials of grace a special means of improving his people in grace; and we may properly conclude what hath been said, with these two remarks:

1. That

1. That it is as great a folly as a sin, for us christians to desire, in any degree, to be our own directors, and that for this plain reason, because we should certainly choose, in that case, to be excused from these trying duties, which we have now seen are special vouchsafements or means for our advancement in sanctification. Would Abraham, think you, have chosen to sacrifice his son, his only son, with his own hands? Or had Moses been left to his own guidance, would he have set himself to go upon the errand on which God sent him? Or again: Should any of us, think you, were we at our own liberty, fall in with such ways, in the discharge of our duty, as would bring us to shame in the eye of the world? No, no: they and we, ever remember, are men, not angels; still, in a measure, fallen sons of fallen Adam: And let it then be our wisdom, as it is our duty, to desire that God may direct us, for that he best knows what is best for us. This is one remark; and the other is,

2. That since Christ makes the greatest trials of grace the greatest means of improving in it, we may not therefore, as christians, be so much our own enemies, as to decline

any duty, through shame or fear of failing in it. We are not to run headlong into trials; that were presumption, and hath no promise from God of a blessing. But when duty evidently calls we must obey; otherwise, by disobeying, we not only rob God of his glory, but ourselves of the intended blessing. The sum is, obedience to God's will, according to his written word, is the compass by which we ought to steer; by warping a little from it, we may escape trial, but we shall certainly miss a reward by keeping to it, God will keep us; and though it may, nay it will, bring us into some distressing circumstances, yet never shall it bring us into any, in which we shall not be graciously supported, and which shall not in the end work for our spiritual good. Keep close therefore, with God's revealed will, the word of his truth: there lies your wisdom. Never deviate from that on any consideration. That, and that alone, is the course which can bring you so to "have your fruit unto holiness, as to have your end everlasting life." Amen.

S E R M O N V I I I .

“ Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down ; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.” Psalm xxxvii. 24.

WE have in these words a most comfortable declaration of God’s tender care of, and watchfulness over his people. Though they may fall into sin, he doth not give them up to its power, but graciously recovers them from it. And if thus, he does not suffer them “ to be utterly cast down ;” if he “ upholds them with his hand,” we cannot then question, but that he makes even these their falls to work for their spiritual good.

This, therefore, is one of those means the all-wise Head of the church makes use of to sanctify his people. To this great purpose, I say, he over-rules even their falls into sin.

The people of God, though regenerate, are liable to fall into sin. This cannot be denied, for if it were, the consequence would be, as far as scripture example can teach us, that there have been no such persons as
have

have been truly regenerate. Noah in his security fell into very gross sins; and so did righteous Lot after him; and Abraham once and again, not only told, but acted a lie. It is hard to say of David, whether he was most notable for his sins, or for his repentance. Peter not only denied his Master, but afterwards in a full enjoyment of all his furniture of grace and gifts, fell into a base compliance with the fears of his heart, through fear of the circumcision. The truth indeed is, truly regenerate persons are only but in part renewed, and have in them still the natural, as well as the new and spiritual principle. The body of sin dwells in them, and their will is but too ready to close with its motions; and which also it would always do, were it not that it is supported against them, by the immediate, actual, and powerful operation of the spirit of God. When, therefore, there is not a strict watchfulness kept over the body of sin, and its motions are not instantly rejected; when the natural pride of our own strength has gained a secret ascendancy, and of course we do not lean on the arm of God, then temptation coming, corrupt nature (as is the nature of it)

it) rises up to join with it, the unsupported will consents, and sin is brought forth. So that unless it should be made appear (which yet it cannot) that in regeneration, the whole body of sin is quite consumed and done away, it cannot but be, that the people of God, in this world, are liable to fall into sin. But the point before us is to shew, that Christ takes occasion by these very sins of his servants, to advance their conquest over it. I am not however insensible how ready, careless, and natural persons will be to screen themselves with the thought that the best sin. And if so, "why is it not nearly or altogether as well with them as with others?" And therefore, while I am speaking of the point before us, it will be exceedingly proper to have this poor pretence continually in view; and to make it plain that the unconverted sinner hath not the least ground of hope from the falls of those converted by grace, because, from beginning to end, their cases totally vary.

To proceed to explain this matter, therefore, in both these views, let us take the case of Peter in denying Christ, for our guide and pattern, adding, as occasion shall be,

be, some illustrations from the case of David. The endeavour being to shew from Peter's case especially, what goes before, and what follows after the falls of God's people; and in both cases, let us also consider, from the instance of Judas in betraying his Master, what goes before, and what follows after, in the sins of natural and unregenerate men.

First, then, it appears, and that evidently from the case of Peter, that the people of God, before they fall into sin, have lost much of their godly fear of heart through self-confidence. "Lord, saith Peter, I am ready to follow thee, not only to prison, but to death; and though all should forsake thee, yet will not I." Now this was talking at a very high, and I believe we must add, a very ignorant rate. There was no sense or knowledge of the power of the body of sin in this. It was not talking like one who had been told, that "without Christ he could do nothing." No; but Peter's case was this: Peter had evidently left all for Christ's sake; as Christ's follower, doubtless had suffered the reproach of his Master—without question, had many times
boldly

boldly stood up in the face of Christ's enemies—had gone out and preached in his name wheresoever his Master had sent him—and it is past dispute his case was, I say, that he was secretly puffed up with all this. What, he said, who had stood so long, and done so much! He that had owned Christ so often, should he now deny him through fear? Thus it is, that through long experience of God's keeping them, his people are wont to lose that fear of falling: to be secretly puffed up, as if there were little or no question of (at least) their acquitting themselves well. And this is the first step in them towards falling into sin, and a sure forerunner of some shameful conduct to follow. For,

Secondly, The next step is a slothful negligence, which always goes close at the heels of this fearless self-confidence. "Rise and pray," saith our Lord to Peter in this state expressly, "lest ye enter into temptation." What need is there? is in effect the answer Peter gives; there is no danger—my eyes are heavy, I will lay me down and sleep a little. Thus it is, that self-confidence makes believers, all believers, slack
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and remiss in their spiritual duties; there grows a coldness over their hearts, as to spiritual desire and working; the flesh pleads—they do not make a stout resistance; they do not rouse themselves up to prayer, meditation, and other means of grace! for they do not see their need of it as usual; and so slothfulness being indulged, this is the

Third place, Begets insensibility. Christ's repeated exhortations made no sort of impression on Peter: "I tell thee, Peter, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." What could be more personal, close and alarming? yet Peter felt it not. Then again, what could be more awakening than what came after? "What could ye not watch with me one hour?" yet it made no kind of impression. No more did the repeated call to prayer; the word was sharp, yet it did not impress. And just so it is with all of us. When pride hath made us slothful, sloth makes us insensible—we hear and read the word of God, as if we read and heard it not—warnings do not reach us—judgments do not alarm us—exhortations do not quicken us—the word of God

as to the power it was wont to have-upon us, hath lost its edge or efficacy. And when this is the case, then follows,

Fourthly, A heedless running into temptation. What business had Peter in the high-priest's hall? Did his Master command him to be there? or was he called there by any duty? He was not come to own his Master; to stand by him in the hour of darkness, if possibly he might be of any service. He was not come, I say, on this account, as is abundantly evident from the event. Wherefore then came he? Why, he came it is plain, out of curiosity. He came to "see the end—what they would do with Jesus." And thus, even thus it is with us also; when through self-confidence we are grown slothful, and are fallen into security and insensibility, (which the good Lord knows we are abundantly liable to) then being off our guard, we venture into needless temptations, at the instance of one bad thing or another; whether it be vanity, or idleness, or pleasure, or pride, or covetousness, &c. And so hence follows,

Lastly, The fall. And in truth, to return to our instance, what else could be ex-

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pected from Peter? Every way he was ready and prepared to fall. He had not the strength of God to keep him; his self-confidence had carried him into the way of temptation; and he was cold, lifeless, and utterly insensible to all apprehension of duty. So the final result was, that he denied Christ, and that with such strong circumstances of fear, as would make any one wonder, who knows not his own heart, how the confident Peter could be brought so very low. This was the progress of St. Peter's sins; but yet after all, it was but the infirmity of a child of God. It was, I say, a sin of infirmity, not a sin of malignity, not a deliberate sin, not a sin of contempt. He was brought into it contrary to his general course and purpose, and through a secret not an allowed practice of natural corruption. Therefore, in every and in all respects, it was a remote and quite contrary thing from the conduct of Judas in betraying his Master; and which will evidently appear by the bare enumeration of such circumstances, as are known to precede the sin of Judas. As,

First, While the general course and purpose

pose of Peter's heart was for Christ, the grand and habitual purpose of the heart of Judas was for the world. "He was a thief," it is expressly said, a covetous worldling; and therefore when he determined to sell Christ, he did it (as it is said the devil makes lies) "of his own;" out of that ungodly principle that is of natural ambition and covetousness, which had at heart dominion over him. But now this did not Peter. The bent of his heart was quite the contrary way, and he was artfully and insensibly drawn away of his lusts and enticed. Wherefore the first step to sin in the unregenerate, is the natural evil desire of their natural heart. But again,

Secondly, It was the reigning malignant covetousness of Judas's heart, which moved him, at the devil's instance, deliberately to devise and determine the betraying of the Lord of life. He did not determine upon it for the sake of committing sin, but for the same reason that others, like him, at this day sin; at the instance of their natural lusts—in his case of covetousness; most likely without so much as considering about the sin there was in it, whether it were more

or less. A natural and unregenerate man, being led along out of the evil treasure of his heart, by pride, covetousness, and carnal mindedness, (the three great leaders of the body of sin) deliberately determines upon, and most readily falls in with any thing proposed to his mind, which may gratify his pride, satisfy his covetousness, or indulge his bodily inclinations. But now the renewed and regenerate do never thus deliberately resolve upon any thing that is sinful; they are always, when they do commit sin, either drawn into it by the deceitfulness of some unseen lust or other, or else they are forced upon it by some present pressing temptation. Peter did not deliberately determine to deny Christ. Nothing is so plain, was farther from the thoughts of his heart. Nay, as far as he saw, it is evident, he was fully determined not to deny him; a self-sufficient and over-confident zeal in this respect, being the very cause of his sin. And so again also,

Thirdly, Peter did not go into his sin contemptuously, as Judas did. He did not indeed hearken to warnings given him: But why did he not? What, because he was determined

determined to deny Christ at all adventures? or rather, was it not expressly because he thought he should never deny him on any account, and therefore needed no warning on that behalf. But now it was the part of Judas utterly to despise his Master's warnings, because he was bent on betraying him. Whether what Christ said to him grated on his conscience or not, it is plain he was fixed upon the thing; so he despised counsel, and would not hearken to reproof. So it is always with those who are without the grace of God; they go on in their sin contemptuously; my meaning is, going on to do what they will, they make no account of God's command respecting it.

And now without farther progress, let any man judge whether Judas could take the least countenance from Peter's sin. Peter, by the very manner of his being drawn into this sin, appears to have been a believer: And every step towards the transgression of Judas, proved him to be an absolute infidel. So true is it, that the unregenerate do nothing as do the children of God; they cannot, if I may be allowed so to speak, even

sin as they do. But enough of this matter.
 Wherefore,
 Having shewn you the steps by which the
 children of God are drawn to sin against
 him, from the case of Peter, and what the
 children of the devil have no cause to take
 countenance from it, from the case of Judas:
 we may now perhaps for the present best
 conclude with a few, as it is hoped, useful
 remarks, from what hath been said. And,
 It appears from the case of St. Peter,
 that believers should be very careful to walk
 humbly, under a constant sense of the deep
 corruption of their natures. Had Peter
 done this, his fall would surely have been
 prevented: but spiritual pride slept in him;
 he was self-confident, and of consequence,
 not seeking to God to keep him, necessarily
 fell. "A haughty spirit (it is manifest)
 goes before a fall." And the reason is,
 "the strength of Christ is made perfect in
 our weakness;" the truth in reality being,
 that "when we are weak,"—when we know
 that we are so in ourselves, then only it is
 that "we are strong in the Lord." But
 how then shall we walk humbly under a
 sense of our weakness? Why this, I say, it

is manifest we cannot do, any further than as we see what we are in ourselves. There is much talking of the grace of God in the world, but very little, I fear, of any sense of the want of it; very little sense, I say, of the absolute want of grace, because of the sinfulness of our nature; always prompting us to every sin, and ready to side still with every temptation. But now a real humble man actually does see the seeds of all sin lying in his natural heart. He knows they are always at work, nay, and also that they must always prevail, for any power or will he has to restrain them. He therefore thinks, and justly thinks, that every trial is, if left to himself, an over-match for him, and the least duty, in that view, impossible for him to perform. We should labour, then, above all things to cultivate this experimental acquaintance with ourselves; so shall we indeed be looking up for strength, in the consciousness of our own insufficiency. And comfortable experience within that case convince us, that "the Lord himself stands by us to save us." But,

2. From the case of St. Peter it farther appears, that we must necessarily and daily watch

watch unto prayer, that we enter not into temptation, and fall by it. But watching unto prayer (as they know who would pray) is not less contrary to the flesh, than it is profitable to the spirit. Alas! to you who are aiming to be christians indeed I speak! How soon do our hands hang down, our zeal decay, our desires abate, our eyes close upon the glorious things of God and eternity; when we do but even slacken a little in our daily meditation and prayer: Then, I say, you who know yourselves, know, that your souls are unarmed, that you find yourselves unfit to fight the Lord's battles, yea hardly are able to defend yourselves. Faith falters, hope languishes, love waxes cold. Why then, ah why do we not wrestle with God in this respect more than we do? Why are we not instant, continuing instant in spiritual meditation and prayer? Is there not a cause? Does not sin stand at the door? Is not Satan also ready, the world abundant in snares, and the flesh prepared to join them? God will have us on our knees, and if our wants will not bring us before him, be assured, if we have hope in his mercy, our sins shall. We have all
need,

need, much need of more abundant prayer. But do not mistake me, I do not mean more abundance of words, but of spiritual earnestness, and abiding importunity in prayer. But again,

3. Peter's case warns us to maintain and improve tenderness under, and to the word of God. It is a lamentable thing, would to God we were sufficiently sensible of it, to lose any part of our feeling to what God says to us, promises to give us, expects from us, or threatens against us. This was the case with the apostle before us. Thence his confidence he was fallen into spiritual slumber; he could not hear the voice of God, nor feel the awful caution. **Take heed how you hear, saith our Lord, and I his minister after him.** As you bear the word, it will harden you, or otherwise. Why are so many, wherever the gospel is preached, here as well as elsewhere, so visibly hardened by it? Why do the threatened judgments of God, even those of eternal damnation, no more, no longer, or but little move them? Why are they come to that height, to cast the commands of God behind them without fear, and so to live as they

they list, as if they had no account to make? The reason is, that because God hath called and they still refused, he hath stretched out his hand and no man regarded; therefore he has left them, as a just judgment, "To eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with the fruit of their own devices." But once more,

4 We should learn from the case of St. Peter, to avoid all needless temptation. When we are not careful to avoid them, we are certainly upon the brink of some soul-wounding sin. It is a sure sign that we are grown self-confident, that we are carelessly fallen into self-security, and that the love of sin is revived, when we dare venture in to needless temptation. There is no surer proof, I say, of a certain spiritual decay, than when we come to this, and are ready to plead the indifference of the thing we do, as a sufficient excuse for doing it. "What harm," would Dinah, Jacob's daughter, say, "can there be, in my going out to see the daughters of the land?" Yet had her heart been right with God, and had she remained in her place, the scandalous consequence would have been prevented. To

plead

plead the harmlessness of a thing which may be dangerous to the soul, is ever the very way of the careless. "What harm is there, say they, in such a dress, book, amusement, company, way of spending my time? Though each of them in their turn, it may be, become a temptation to one or another of the most inveterate corruption of the human heart. Not so therefore, the people of God. They will be hourly careful to preserve the spirituality, integrity, and purity of their minds, by keeping far out of danger. And in truth they never do run heedlessly into the way of it, till in their souls they have previously suffered damage. Let then the experience of the past teach us, what are our old sins, which bring us under peculiar flame in the review of our lives. Let us examine, are they not those we have committed by venturing into needless temptation? When we are indeed in the way of duty, observe and remember it well, we have reason to believe God will keep us; but there is no reason why we should expect to be kept of God, when we do not even honestly aim (in and by grace) to keep ourselves. Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N IX.

"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked shall fall into mischief." Prov. xxiv. 10.

AMONG the means made use of by the Head of the church for purifying the hearts of his people, it was proposed to shew that he makes even their falls into sin effectual to that purpose. In speaking to which point, two things were to be considered: First, What goes before. And secondly, What follows after the sins both of the regenerate and unregenerate.

What goes before the falls of God's people has been shewn from the example of Peter, to be self-confidence and (which issue therefrom), spiritual sloth, insensibility to the word, and entering into needless temptations. But that they do not go on in sin, as, from the case of Judas, the unregenerate are seen to do, maliciously, deliberately, contemptuously, was made abundantly plain. We are now,

Secondly, To consider what follows the falls

falls of God's people, as also those of the unconverted: And hence to discover how and in what manner the falls of believers are made conducive to their more perfect establishment. And those, of all others, to their great hardness of heart. Now therefore,

First, Whereas self-confidence in Peter (to take up our former instance), had begotten an insensibility to the word; Christ now gives it power, and makes the heart disposed to receive it. Before his fall, Peter, all self-sufficient, had not an ear to hear the most pressing exhortations or warnings, but now a hard look was enough. "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." That look was sufficient; it sunk into his heart; it came into his soul like a dagger; he was ashamed and confounded; he was filled with confusion, shame, remorse, and self-reproof.

It is not indeed always so soon that this self-reproof by the power of Christ touches the heart. In the case of David, after his grievous fall respecting Uriah, there was a very considerable space of time in which he lay wholly insensible, and without any spi-

ritual feeling : but whenever the reproof comes, it is always in such a way and manner, as fully to convince the soul it proceeds from the Spirit of God. Why was not David brought sooner than the space of many months to a thought of himself? and why was not Peter also after the first and second denial, as well as after the third? Nay, can it be supposed that they had lost their common reason and senses? Can it be thought, that David did not know all the while that murder and adultery were sins? or that Peter, after his first and second denial, was persuaded that he was then doing nothing amiss? We cannot admit or suppose this : No ; but whatever knowledge they had of their duty, and whatever reproofs from the word of God (and no doubt in all that time David had often heard the word of God, and had been no more without his warnings than Peter) ; yet, I say, till the Spirit of Christ came and set their sins home upon their hearts, neither their knowledge, no, nor yet the word, had any the least power ; but they lay altogether insensible, and dead to spiritual feeling. We see, then, that the recovery of believers after their falls

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is purely by Christ, and that the first step he takes to effect it, is to remove their insensibility under and to his word. Wherefore this being happily effected, his

Second proceeding is, freely to plead with their consciences. He sets their sin before them; shews it in all its circumstances, aggravations; and causes; and hereby brings the soul out from that slothful inactivity in which it had before been lying. And this pleading of God with the minds of his people, is also always directly or indirectly by means of his word. "Peter remembered the words of Jesus, how he said unto him, before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice." And we find this same pleading more largely executed by Nathan, for the conviction of David. "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: I anointed thee king over Israel, and delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom: and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given thee such and such things; wherefore then hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah

the Hittite with the sword of the children of Ammon."

Thus closely doth Christ, as their Head or Husband, plead strictly with the souls of his people; setting their iniquities in order before them; marking out the aggravations of them as done against past mercies; and shewing them the evil and sinfulness of each particular and personal transgression; especially as all are traced up to corrupted nature, the fountain head out of which the sin originally issued; as David in his case expressly owned and acknowledged: "Behold, saith he, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." This was the enemy which strove within him, and prevailed against him. And hence, therefore, the heart being thus brought to a quick sense of sin, and the sin exhibited in its proper colours, follows,

Thirdly, Godly sorrow for sin. "Peter went out and wept bitterly." He could not contain himself; his heart was big with grief; he sought in what place he might give free vent to his sorrow, and went out that he might bewail himself alone before God. But now a little more particularly; wherefore

fore did Peter weep? He wept because he felt his Lord's divine displeasure. A child who knows his father's love, cannot but feel when he lies under his displeasure. Guilt for the present had destroyed his comfort in God. But that was not the sum; his ingratitude in denying so dear, so affectionate, so good a Master, stung him to the heart; his disloyalty too in denying him after so many protestations;—and his unkindness also in denying him at such a critical trying time;—to which add, the great injury done thereby to his honor and interest, were each crimes extremely painful to him on due reflection. What was his denial, but owning him in fact to be a malefactor, and giving a practical consent to what his enemies were doing against him? The baseness of it also was distressingly present to his mind; to deny him through fear, and that of a poor servant maid. Views, like these, were they, which made Peter mourn bitterly. And what think you did he now judge of his own over-weening self-confidence; would he ever, do you imagine, trust his own heart any more? Oh! to how low, and how humiliating a degree were his proud looks

brought ! and how deeply was he now made sensible, that it could only be a power from on high which could bring him again to own the name of Christ ! Peter therefore went out, and in penitent bitterness of spirit, opened his grief before God. The children of God, when overtaken at any time in sin, do not in proud despair like the wicked, fly from God, but to him in conscious shame. And what then is the consequence ? The apostle informs us ; “ This self-same thing, saith he, that ye sorrow after a godly sort ;—what carefulness it wrought in you,” to forsake the sin into which ye had fallen !—“ Yea what clearing of yourselves” from the guilt of it, by sincere confession to God, and earnest supplication for mercy : “ Yea what indignation” against yourselves, on account of the things which ye had done ! “ Yea what fear” of falling again into the like transgression ! “ Yea what vehement desire” of returning to and pleasing God ! “ Yea what zeal” in his service ! “ Yea what revenge” upon yourselves and your lusts that had brought you into this evil ! Or, if you will see more clearly, if possible, the true godly mourning

ing. of the believing soul after having fallen into sin, you may find it largely exemplified in the 51st Psalm; where David, in the spirit and sense of his transgression, respecting Uriah, lays open his whole heart before God, begs for mercy, and pleads for nothing but mercy: "Have mercy upon me, saith he, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." And as he begs this with earnestness, so, from the deepest sense of his own vileness, in the most piercing remembrance of his sin; in the most affecting discovery of the dishonor that he had done to God by it, and in the clearest sense of his having incurred his deserved wrath, he adds, "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest." Neither doth he in any measure rest in the outside only, but he is led into the very bottom of his heart; the very fountain of his sin is laid open before him, while he thus sues for mercy, confesses his iniquities, and justifies
God

God in his judgments against him: "Behold, saith he, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold thou requirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." And now, as is exceedingly natural to a soul like his, big with distress, and penetrated with the sense of a great variety of wants, his prayer becomes irregular; and by turns he begs forgiveness, comfort, grace, renovation, and the immediate sense of God's presence, as his need of the one or the other of these presented itself to his soul; and in the asking of them, you will find at the bottom strong actings of faith, ardent purposes of living to the glory of God, and longing desire of the prosperity and increase of God's people.

Thus, then, it is that the servants of Christ are brought to godly sorrow, and thence humbly to return to God after their falls into sin; and judge then, if it doth not by these means advance in them, a clear and deep knowledge of the sinfulness and apostacy of their nature; a true repentance for, and a real hatred of sin; mortification of pride and self-sufficiency; humble reverence

rence of God's judgments; increasing value for the blood of Christ; and a daily habitual tenderness of conscience in walking more closely with God; and if so, can it be doubted whether the great and good Head of the church doth not make the very falls of his servants, signal means of their sanctification?

But here, perhaps, some one may say, "Why, truly, I have had falls into sin, but I have not found all this good from them, of which you have been speaking." This may be likely, very likely, but then what was the cause of it? Consider, did you not quench the Spirit? How, you will say? Why, after your falls there was no small stir and commotion in your conscience about it: this you allow; but then I say, you did not sufficiently submit to it; you did not give so humble an ear as you ought to the remonstrance and pleading which the Spirit would have made about the matter; you stopped him short; grew secure too hastily; you did not allow time for self-enquiry and humiliation; nor set yourself with immediate diligence to seek God in prayer and confession. It is evident to all, and,

and, as a christian, it cannot be hid from yourself, that your profiting by any fall, can only be in proportion to your humiliation for it; so that if you have not received, in any case, the good you might from your fall, it was not owing to Christ's want of love, but to your own want of diligence. You cannot, as a christian, be ignorant, that in all cases you must "work together with him;" and if when he calls you, you do not hearken, it must necessarily be, that his call cannot be effectual to do the service it would have done had you been obedient to it.

But will not another object and say (for man's heart is capable of any thing), "Why, if so much good as you speak of is gotten by ~~sin~~, is it not good to sin?" The apostle you may remember puts this very question, and his answer to it must also be mine; if you can reason in this manner "your damnation is just;" for this were in the highest degree to tempt God. How can you expect his blessing, when you set yourself industriously to sin against, affront, and dishonour him? Nay, but a regenerate man cannot do this: "He that is born of God cannot sin, because
he

he is born of God;" he cannot wilfully chuse to sin on any account whatsoever: when he does sin, it is by surprize and infirmity; and in that case the faithful God graciously recovers him again; but then it is ever, I am apt to believe, and invariably, by the most severe discipline. It is possible, indeed, some awakened, but unconverted person, may think, that were he to fall into some grievous sin, it would effectually humble him; but this is all in the lamentable ignorance of his want of his divine grace, and in the pride of an unbroken spirit.

We have now seen what follows after the falls of God's people; let us now, on the other hand, examine a little what ensues on the sins of the unregenerate; and let the case of Judas teach us, that, if it pleases God, we may learn the difference between the one and the other. And,

First, The unregenerate have or they have not gallings of conscience after sin. If they have not; if by habit of sinning, and long opposition to the remonstrances of their minds, they are past feeling; this looks fearfully, like a state of reprobation, and as
if

if they were given over to work all uncleanness with greediness: Dreadful condition indeed! to be sealed up to everlasting burnings, and to be under the power of that most dreadful forerunner of it, insensibility to all its terrors! and yet, where men are so much hardened in sin, as to feel even nothing after committing it, certain it is, that every act of sin hath an immediate effect in them, to increase the hardness of heart, as metal beaten on the anvil grows harder every stroke; but if there are gallings of conscience, then, according to the degree of them, they beget that sorrow of the world, which worketh death; and this is the

Second effect of an unregenerate man's falling into sin. A natural and unregenerate man hath neither faith nor love, for it is "faith that worketh by love" which constitutes a regenerate man. Now, therefore, the natural and unregenerate man being without these principles of faith and love, when his conscience rebukes him on account of sin, he cannot sorrow after a godly sort, but his grief is of that kind which the apostle calls "sorrow that worketh death:" for it fills him with deadly fears, vexation, anxiety, and

and increasing bitterness of conscience. Now sometimes this lasts but for a little space, soon passing away in forgetfulness occasioned by one or another worldly object diverting the mind; but at other times, especially when some judgment of God (such as sickness, disease, grievous crosses, accidents, or circumstances) falls in with it; it then rests upon the spirit, tears it, as it were, in pieces; and since, as I have said, thro' the want of faith and love, it cannot have issue the right way; it drives on to desperate courses, seeking peace, as well as the poor soul can which happens to be exercised by it, either in company, or business, or pleasure, or drunkenness, or other such forgetful methods, and which is the common course with the most, though sometimes, more rarely, it may force the man, through madness or rage of grief, to put a violent end to life, as was the case with Ahitophel and Judas.

And now, therefore, let any one determine, whether there be not infinite difference between what follows upon the sins of regenerate and unregenerate persons; and whether, while the one by their falls are drawn nearer to God in true repentance,

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and

and the other driven farther by their sins into desperation; whether, I say, the unconverted, in this case, have the least ground to take comfort from any of the miscarriages of the people of God?

We have now finished what we proposed, respecting the means which Christ uses, for purging and purifying the hearts of his people, and have shewn you, that Christ hath skill, power, and care to render those things which in themselves seem most unlikely, serviceable to his purpose in our sanctification; the common afflictions of life; the trouble arising from living in an evil world; sufferings for righteousness' sake; the very temptations of satan, and those especially which have most of hell in them; the severest trials of grace; and even falls into sin, are signal means, which however little a blind world may believe it, or we ourselves may be sensible of it, Christ uses to promote in believers the growth of holiness, and to mortify in them the body of sin. Happy, happy they, who have put themselves under his care! He cleanses them from their guilt, and clothes them with his righteousness, and is carefully and daily

daily adding to their meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Ah, happy, I repeat it, "yea blessed are the people who are in such a case!" Who can say they are not blessed, when the Lord, in whom they trust, turns their very curses into blessings! But how deplorable then is the sad condition of those who will not have Christ to rule over them! who, by a miserable infatuation, are not only forsaking their own future mercies, but also daily turning their daily blessings, either into a curse or a snare! yet this is the wisdom, the boasted wisdom of this world. We must become fools if we would be wise, and readily give up all for a crucified Master, else we are wretched here, and alas, who can tell how much more wretched we shall be hereafter! May the Lord grant that none here may know it by his own most fatal experience.

Amen. Amen.

S E R M O N X.

“ And he shall sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver : and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver; that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness,” Mal. iii. 3.

THE person here spoken of is Christ, as appears from the first verse ; where he is described as having his fore-runner sent before him, and also by his proper title, “ The Lord, the Angel, or Messenger of the covenant. In the text a most important branch of Christ’s holy mediatorial office is declared to us ; in the which he is compared to a refiner of metals, as, by various operations, he purges and purifies his people from all base mixtures and earthly impurities, till he purely refines and reduces them to their proper and most perfect standard.

But he is here said particularly to “ sit as a refiner to purify the sons of Levi.” The sons of Levi, you may remember, among the Jews, were peculiarly set apart to the service

service of God; and so do very aptly represent, to the end of time, God's chosen priesthood, as the apostle calls true christians. Over these then he sits as a refiner, to purge them from their sinful defilements, that finally they may offer to him, their Lord, "an offering in righteousness."

The text therefore directs, not so much to consider the means, as the manner, in which the Lord carries on in his people the great work of purification; and we will so, through grace, aim to consider it. And,

First then, in this view, he brings them into such circumstances as are best suited for improving their graces, and for mortifying their corruptions. We may not, as christians, think that any thing falls out to us by chance, but it becomes us to be perpetually sensible that every the minutest circumstance attending us, is under a divine direction, and that in the nicest exactness with the wants of our souls. Those who have their senses exercised to a spiritual discernment of the ways of providence, clearly discover this in past dispensations, and they see it with admiration and thankfulness. "How wisely and how seasonably, will one

of these say, was such a dispensation calculated to meet with the desire of man's esteem, the pride of life, the love of ease, the schemes of honour or interest, all which my fond and foolish heart had conceived." And you will not therefore wonder if such an enlightened soul should draw from hence the strongest arguments for present resignation and thankfulness, under every pressing temptation or trial, saying, "I know, for I have been taught by repeated experience, that this also shall work for my good." To which also add,

Secondly, When the Head of the Church hath thus brought his people into such circumstances as are best suited to his purpose for improving their graces, and for mortifying their corruptions, he takes occasion by these circumstances to shew them the weakness of the one, and the strength of the other. Metals, however they may appear in the ore, have their dross and impurities; it is the furnace alone that must prove them. And of grace it must be said, as of metals: "The fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." So, as instruments in God's hand, Satan taught Job his impatience—

Saul

Saul taught David his Distrust of God—and the high-priest's servants taught Peter his shame and fear. When the trial comes, "the thoughts of our hearts are made manifest," of what sort they are. Then we find to our humbling, if truly christians, that we have not that faith in God, love towards him, trust in him, or concern for him, to which in the days of our ease and freedom from pressings trials, we were ready, it may be, to fancy we had attained. And this is the method which Christ takes to shew us our proper selves; by which method he draws out to view as occasion is, either our covetousness, or our love of ease, or of life, or of man's esteem; our pride, selfishness, or our carnal mindedness; our want of faith or hope, or charity.

Thus it is, that by peculiar circumstances suited to the cases of their souls, Christ evidently shews to his people the weakness of their graces, and the power of their corruptions: But then,

Thirdly, These his dispensations (and which is chiefly to be noted) are always so ordered, that his people cannot possibly maintain a good conscience, but by vigorously

rously exerting their graces on the one hand, and by strenuously opposing their corruptions on the other. Thus, for instance, the prophet Jonah was commanded to go to the Ninevites with a message from God, very disagreeable to them, and consequently no less dangerous to himself. Now here his faith was weak and his fears strong; and so, instead of going, he rises up to fly, as he was able, from the presence of God, and to escape, if he could, the divine command. But now, was this following a good conscience, to endeavour by flight to avoid doing what God expressly bade him do? And what in the end did he gain by it? Why, as you may see by the story, it brought him into a most grievous strait; and after all, with the weak faith he had, and with all his fears about him, he must go and deliver God's message: there was no declining it without directly sinning against the divine commandment. And so it is with us continually: the divine dispensations are perpetually calling us out to duty, and often doing it in such manner, that we cannot decline without downright sin, yet cannot act without much self-denial. In the way of
providence

providence you are called upon, as a faithful believer, to own Christ in some more extraordinary manner, which you see will expose you to the reproach or resentment of the world.

Now, at the thoughts of this, faith starts back and fear pleads. But what can you do? The case is such, that you cannot decline what you are called to, without positively flying in the face of conscience and duty. Or again, you are brought into some outward trouble, out of which your way is plain and open by a little departure from duty, but hedged up, strait and difficult, if you stedfastly adhere to the will of God. Now here inclination, ease, interest, shame, and fear of the world, strongly plead for compliance, and trust in God singly, is left to oppose. You are therefore in a great strait; you must sin or suffer; nor can you possibly keep a good conscience, in this case, without such self-denial as will be to you like cutting off a right hand, or plucking out a right eye.

In this manner it is that the Lord Christ keeps his people, by the peculiarity of his dispensations towards them, at a point with
corruptions,

corruptions, and brings them into such circumstances, that they must of all necessity use the grace they have, and stand to their duty if they will not wound their conscience, and plainly give up all by sin. And every faithful believer may farther find upon inquiry, that these dispensations have, respecting himself, been such, as that not only by calling to self-denying duty, they had a tendency to improve in him the whole power of grace, and mortify the whole body of sin, but also to strengthen that peculiar grace which was most needed, and to bring down that particular corruption which carried its head the highest. To which gracious end also,

Fourthly, When the Lord Christ hath, by the measure just mentioned, brought his people, that they must either sin or deny themselves; then, in answer to their prayers, he gives them grace and strength to do their duty, by enabling them to display a more vigorous exercise of faith and self-denial according to the present emergency.

But now it is certain, that the people of God are not always brought to this point directly: For in the power of unbelief they
may

may be still for declining duty, and for coming to a composition upon the matter more favourable to flesh and blood. So that instead of immediately flying to the throne of grace for strength, they may be, for a season, hearkening to their own reasonings, and concerting measures to avoid the niceties. Thus we see precisely Jonah (in the instance above considered) did not. Instead of calling upon God as he ought to have done, to enable him for the work allotted him, in opposition to the sinful fear and love of ease and life, he rises up to fly unto Tarshish. And in all such cases, respecting ourselves, the flesh will not fail (and that loudly) to clamour against the strictness of the duty, and to plead with all its power for sparing ourselves. But if by having committed our souls to Christ (and this is the point to be considered) we are the objects of care and love, he then, one way or other, never fails to bring us to duty and self-denial at last.

Jonah could not fly so fast from the Lord, but he could overtake and bring him back. However unwilling Jonah the prophet of the Lord was, no one else must carry God's message to Nineveh. And just so it is with us

us who are Christ's servants, when we would be flying from duty, and for sparing ourselves, the Lord has ways of bringing us to it, and such as the world knows nothing of; he can hide his face from us (such as are spiritual will readily understand me)—take away our comfort and joy—let us walk heavily—give us no answer to our prayers—meet us in no ordinance—let Satan loose upon us to haunt us with terrifying apprehensions—raise up our accusing conscience—suffer us to fall into some soul-wounding sin: he hath various ways of bringing us to duty and self-denial; of which the world, I say, is utterly ignorant. And though we have escaped the cross by flying from it in any one particular instance; yet by some other way, if we are truly his, he will be sure to bring us back to it. We must and shall come to the point where we went off; nay, and oppose too that very corruption we were willing to spare.

The prophet would not go to Nineveh; we would have our reputation in the world; but Jonah, as the prophet of the Lord, shall go to Nineveh. And we, as Christ's servants, shall suffer shame for Christ's sake.

Whether

Whether sooner or later, Christ brings his people back to the point; shews them his will must be done; silences all their objections; forces them on their knees for strength and might; then gives them what they ask; enabling them to stand to their duty (tho' with fear, it may be, and trembling) and to deny themselves. And now, therefore, being, under peculiar dispensations, suited to their case, thus brought to the actual exercise of grace and self-denial, by these means it is,

Lastly, That grace is strengthened, and sin loses its power. And thus is the very declaration signified and made knowe in the text. As metal repeatedly put into the fire, comes out pure and refined; so is sin weakened and grace strengthened by repeated exercise and discipline. Neither is it conceivable how sin should become increasingly mortified, or faith be abundantly confirmed, unless, under proper dispensations, the one were opposed, and the other called forth into action. Every exercise of grace makes some addition to its strength; and every opposition to corruption diminishes somewhat its power, while also those exercises of

grace which are most trying are most confirming, and those self-denials which are most severe, do most signally crucify the body of sin. However the false devotions of Papists and some Protestants may have cried up, retiring from the world, and confinement to the closet; yet it is in fact but the poor and wretched refuge of those who have not faith enough not to fear men, and not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for the man who keeps his station in life, and by the grace of God maintains his ground manfully against every kind of temptation and suffering, will of the two, be found incomparably the most like his Master. And if any man yet doubt of this, let him look to the "glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs," and their example, it is to be hoped, will fully confirm him; the fact in truth being, that there is nothing more dishonourable in a christian, than hiding the head, nothing more contrary to the spirit of the gospel, nor any thing more destructive of real true spiritual improvement.

Upon the whole, before we fully conclude,

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it may be proper to make an observation or two, which familiarly and obviously present themselves. And,

1. One of these is, that in all trials we should endeavour to see the hand of God as extended in the view which the text represents, "Refining and purifying us" from our sinful corruptions. If we let things pass over us, as if they happened to us by chance, we can neither, as we ought, be patient under our trials, nor get any lasting advantage by them. That kind of unbelief is exceedingly uncomfortable, which looks no higher than second causes, which leaves us in our trials and troubles without any thought of God's providence, and which suffers us to grapple alone with them, as if we were without hope or without help: but to see all as we ought to see it, under a divine direction, and all dispensed as it is dispensed, with the wisest and kindest design; this takes out, as it were, the sting of trouble, and promotes a due improvement of a quiet acquiescence under it. This is one thing I would wish should be observed. And another is,

2. That as we hope for the spiritual improvement intended, we must be steadfast in

duty as the case may happen to be. We must well consider what the Lord would have us do, and then, in opposition to ourselves steadily put forth our strength to do it. To step aside from the way of duty, is at once to surrender ourselves into the hands of our lusts; but to cleave stedfastly to it, is to bring our lusts into greater subjection, and to gain some certain addition to the power of godliness. Earnestly pray, therefore, in every trial, "that your faith fail not;" that, at all events, you may be enabled to stand to your duty, and may be in no degree detained or hindered by the strivings of your own corrupted heart. Do this, and then every trial and trouble will take from sin—add to grace in you—and more prepare you for glory.

Thus much, then, of the manner in which the Lord Christ proceeds in his work of purging and purifying the hearts of his people. May the good Lord grant that we may make our profiting by it appear, to our present good improvement, and to our future abundant confidence; for surely "not one word shall return void of all that the Lord hath spoken!" Amen.

A SERMON,

A
S E R M O N,

E N T I T L E D

DIVINE BOUNTY DISPLAYED;

An attempt to prove, and illustrate, that all
goodness in the creature is the free gift
and sole work of God.

Preached in the Parish Church of St. Mary's,

KINGSTON upon HULL.

By the Rev. MR. BARKER.

ROM. xi. 36.

"For of him, and thro' him, and to him are all things; to
whom be glory for ever." Amen.

PRINTED BY D. INNES AND A. GRAY, FOR THE
PUBLISHER R. BATTLE, MANOR-ALLEY.

MDCCXCII.

Divine Bounty Displayed, &c.

“Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

JAMES i. 17.

THO' man is, a frail helpless creature, every moment dependent upon God, and cannot in fact without him so much as think a good thought; yet he is naturally in a state of deplorable ignorance and insensibility with regard to his extreme impotence, and his absolute dependence upon God at all times. His being grossly ignorant of these matters, has a very malignant influence on his mind and conduct, for it makes him proud and self-sufficient, it causes him to forget God, and to act as if he were entirely independent of him. Thus it is with men until they are taught of God, and are endued

endued with a measure of that wisdom which is from above. But it requires many mortifying lessons, much humbling instruction in order to bring them to see things in a true and proper light. It is, generally speaking, a considerable space of time before they duly apprehend or perceive their own utter emptiness and inability, and God's fullness and all-sufficiency, and are made willing to ascribe the whole glory of salvation to his wisdom, power, and grace.

Humbling as it may be to our pride and vanity, we have nothing which we can properly call our own but sin, and that is in a peculiar appropriate sense our own. It is assuredly not of God, for he neither is, nor possibly can be, either the author, or the cause of it. Hence says the apostle in the context, Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man, — i. e. as the devil does to commit any wickedness or sin. And then after describing in a clear manner the rise, progress, and issue of temptation, and warning them against running into erroneous opinions as to the source and cause of

of sin; he proceeds to point out, in the text, what *actually*, and what *only*, comes, or *can* come from God, whom he characterises as a perfectly pure, unvarying, immutable Being. "Every," &c.

What I chiefly propose in this discourse, is, to illustrate and enforce the important truth contained in these words, in order that we may be truly humbled under a sense of our native poverty and nothingness, and may be induced to place an unreserved dependence upon God, who alone can supply our numerous wants, and bestow upon us every needful benefit and blessing.

However highly men may value themselves on account of their comparative excellencies, their distinguished abilities, or their eminent attainments, whether of a natural, moral, or spiritual nature, it is a certain well-established truth, that all good which is in the creature proceeds wholly from God. Every bounty of providence, every spiritual endowment, which tends to the perfection of our nature in knowledge and holiness, is from above; and therefore is not from a man's self, from the creature, or from below, but from heaven, and from God who dwells there

there, and who confers them when, how, and on whom he pleases. It seems to be a subject of no small dispute and altercation among men, whether the salvation of sinners is to be ascribed solely to the sovereign unmerited grace and mercy of God through Christ Jesus, or to human endeavours, attainments, or worthiness, in part at least, if not absolutely and entirely.

Now if it can be fully and clearly proved from scripture declarations and scripture testimonies that eternal life itself, and also whatever is previously requisite to the full possession and enjoyment of it, are the free spontaneous gifts of God, then all human boasting must be excluded, and divine grace alone be honoured and exalted.

And, First, As to eternal life, it is expressly affirmed, that it is the gift of God. The apostle *St. Paul*, after declaring that the wages of sin is death, immediately subjoins with a striking variation in the form of his expression,—"but the gift of God, is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." *Rom. vi. 23.* He does not, let it be carefully noticed, represent a state of future felicity as a reward of debt, or as wages due to

to any praise-worthy actions performed by men: but as a matter of free donation or gift. If we advert to St. John's testimony respecting this subject, we shall find that he speaks the same language, and maintains the very same kind of doctrine. "God," says he, "hath given to us eternal life," &c. 1 John v. 11. By sin men have utterly forfeited all right and title to this inestimable blessing, and by their own personal obedience, as being at best sinful and imperfect and vastly below the demands and requirements of God's holy law, they can never regain or become entitled to it. To think otherwise, is a mistake of a very egregious and dangerous nature. As a matter of no trivial consequence, it highly concerns all with the utmost vigilance and care, to guard against running into, or remaining under the influence of such a mistake. At an infinite expence the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased and procured eternal life, and it can be obtained by sinful men in no other way or manner, than as the absolutely free gift of God through our divine Redeemer. As this is actually the case, let none oppose God and wrong their own souls, by refusing to be

be indebted to him for the greatest possible gift. Rather let them with unfeigned gratitude and thankfulness, accept his munificent and gracious overture, ascribing due praise to him for the same. Hence we may perceive man's undoubted obligations to God for the gift of eternal life. But,

Secondly, If we farther find, on enquiry, that whatever is confessedly requisite to render him meet for the vision and fruition of God, is plainly a matter of gift, his debt of obligation must undoubtedly be enhanced, or raised to a degree still much higher. Sin has brought great disorder upon the soul of man. It has blinded his understanding, perverted his will, and vitiated his affections; and unless these faculties of the soul are effectually healed and rectified, nothing can be expected but consequences of a most deadly and fatal kind. And it highly concerns him to know in what way, and by what means, the actual recovery and salvation of his soul may be effected, and all the misery and ruin consequent on sin be certainly and finally avoided. His duty and interest loudly and forcibly call upon him to change his evil heart and nature, to humble himself in

in the sight of God, for all that he has done amiss, to repent and believe the gospel, and to yield a hearty unreserved obedience to all the commands and precepts of God. But tho' man is bound, by the strongest motives, to do all these things, they will undoubtedly ever be left undone by him, unless he is renewed in the spirit of his mind by a supernatural agency, is effectually inclined and enabled by God himself to perform such acts of obedience and piety as he requires of him. Besides knowing, then, that the things which have been mentioned are obligatory and binding upon us as matters of real *indispensible* duty; it is also highly necessary to understand and believe, that they are each of them represented in scripture, as the free gifts of God, and the entire produce of his mighty operation. None ever possess them, none ever exercise or practise them, unless they have received them from above. If, then, we speak of a new heart and a new nature, of unfeigned repentance, of saving faith, of sanctification, &c. we are abundantly warranted to say, "all these things are of God," they are his gifts, and

and they have no existence among men, until they actually receive them from him.

Unspeakably indebted to God are all his children; because whatever he requires of them in the way of duty, he graciously promises that he himself will do it for them, and adored be his goodness, he never fails them in this respect. Let us place this matter in a scriptural point of view, and we shall see it in a very clear and striking light. And,

1. Because the human heart is corrupt, hard, deceitful and desperately wicked, God expressly enjoins men to "make them a new heart and a new spirit," *Ezek. xviii. 31.* This, then, is plainly their bounden duty, and if they do not act accordingly, if they neglect to do this thing which God commands them to do, their disobedience makes them beyond a doubt highly culpable, and justly punishable. That this may not be the case with the children of God, that they may be delivered from the effects of sin and disobedience, and may not be condemned with the rest of the world, God graciously turns their duty into a matter of privilege. Hear and duly consider what he says on this subject. "I will

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give

give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them an heart of flesh," *Ezek. xi. 19.* Hence it is plain, that a right and becoming frame of mind, a new spirit, a relenting penitent heart, are not of man's producing, but they are purely the effects of a divine agency or operation. Again,

2. Because men have basely sinned against God, have offended and provoked him by a disobedient conduct, and have renounced their due allegiance to him, He "now," on these accounts, "commands all men every where to repent;" i. e. to change the state and frame of their minds, and to alter and amend the tenor and course of their future conduct. As this is the case, it cannot be disputed, that it is highly incumbent upon them to do and act accordingly. Indeed few will directly and flatly deny either the necessity or the importance of repentance. Conscious of having deviated, in many instances, from the known rules of duty and obedience, and of having committed many sins,—most men perceive it needful, and even think it very proper to
repent;

repent : they therefore propose to commence true penitents sometime or other before they die. Persuaded that repentance is a matter entirely within the sphere of their own ability, and finding themselves indisposed to the present exercise of it, they are too prone to entertain the deceitful idea of postponing or putting it off to as late a period of life as possible. Hence, old age, a sick-bed, or a near visible prospect of death, are the seasons usually proposed for setting about the performance of this highly requisite and important work. But such apprehensions are awfully delusive—they betray superlative ignorance, folly, and impiety. As sinners, it is men's immediate duty, without the least delay, unfeignedly to repent, and, for neglecting or omitting to do this, they enhance not a little their degree of guilt and culpability. It is, however, abundantly plain from the scriptures, that tho' repentance be man's duty, it is the gift of God our Saviour, and until he bestows it upon men, they evade it and never put it in practice.

In proof of what I have here said, in respect to repentance being a divine donation

er gift, I would direct your serious attention to the testimony of St. *Peter*, who, preaching Christ to the *Jews*, speaks concerning him in the following terms, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel," &c. *Acts* v. 31. By this plain declaration, we are informed in what way the children of God obtain repentance; it is a gift conferred upon them by their gracious exalted Saviour. And as this is actually the case, we must abandon the idea of its conditionality in our salvation, or of its being self-produced or self-wrought. For none can maintain any such idea without manifestly opposing and contradicting the clear testimony of God's word, and undoubted matter of fact. Nor does this view of the matter in the least invalidate men's obligation to repent; it is certainly a duty incumbent upon them, and it is their fault and not their misfortune, if they do not practise it. Let all true penitents, however, be thankful to God, by whose grace alone they are made to differ from others, and from what they themselves once were in their natural unconverted state. Let persons

sons of this description, in the sincerity of their hearts, thus ascribe glory to God, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise." Once more,

3. Faith, or a belief in Christ for remission of sins and eternal life, is confessedly of great importance to men. And it ought, for very weighty and substantial reasons, to be considered in this light: for the holy scriptures testify, that "without faith it is impossible to please God"—and that "he who believeth shall be saved: but he who believeth not shall be damned." It cannot therefore be an insignificant matter whether men are true believers or infidels, whether they are actually endued with faith, or are utterly destitute of it, seeing the consequence is of so important a nature. Some indeed tell us, it matters not what a man's creed is, or whether in reality he has any at all, provided he is morally decent and upright in his conduct. But this is a fallacious notion, a very vain surmise, and ought to be treated as such by every real christian. All true piety springs from faith, and all acceptable obedience, is plainly the obedience of faith; so that it is impossible

the life and conduct should be good, when faith the only principle whence all good actions can proceed, is wanting. Were not faith of the utmost significance, such excellent things would not be spoken of it in the holy scriptures,—such wonderful energy would not be ascribed to it, nor would it be so strenuously urged upon men as a leading capital duty. But tho' faith, i. e. a real belief or persuasion of the revealed will of God in his word, be plainly mens duty, it is an immediate effect of regeneration, its origin is divine, and it must be comprehended in the account given by the apostle, in our text, "Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Faith in scripture is said to be the *gift* of God, *Eph. ii. 8.*—of his operation, *Col. ii. 12.*—our Lord Jesus is declared to be its *Author and Finisher*, *Heb. xii. 2.* And of true christians, St. Paul affirms that it is *given* them to believe in Christ, *Phil. i. 29.* These testimonies I apprehend, fully prove and establish the point under consideration.—In fine, whatever is good comes from God—it is from him that "all holy desires, all good

good counsels, and all just works do proceed." And therefore as residing in, or having place among men, they are to be considered as emanations from God, his free spontaneous gifts, and to him, as the author, bestower, and supporter of them, the entire praise and glory must be ascribed.

Let us now conclude with a few suitable remarks and observations. And,

First, From what has been said on this subject, it is plain that fallen sinful creatures have no ground for glorying on account of any personal worth, excellencies, or attainments. The consideration that "every good, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," is abundantly sufficient to quash and beat down all self-exaltation and self-esteem. Let it teach you the needful lessons of true humility and self-abasement. Be convinced by it of your real poverty, emptiness, and nothingness. Know your absolute entire dependence upon God, and your utter insufficiency for any thing that is good without him. Humble yourself in his sight, and then he will not fail to exalt you in due time. Learn by earnest prayer and supplication,

cation, to seek from God every needful blessing whether of a temporal or a spiritual nature. Particularly be solicitous to obtain an interest in the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be endued with the faith of God's elect, repentance unto life, and heavenly tempers and dispositions. These are, all of them, the gifts of God, and you will infallibly ever remain destitute of them, unless he bestows them upon you. Seriously consider your extreme need or want of these important blessings, and what must be the certain alarming consequence of dying, without having been brought to a participation of them. Such as do so, it is abundantly manifest, will be confounded when they appear before the God of purity and holiness, who will consign them to abodes of misery and woe for ever and ever. Hence,

Secondly, permit me to warn and admonish all careless persons of their perilous situation and imminent danger. It is abundantly evident that instead of loving, serving, and obeying God as you ought to do, you are daily fighting and rebelling against him. By your daring violation of his holy laws, you impiously insult and provoke him.

him. For the dread Majesty of heaven you have plainly no regard—he is not an object on which you bestow any proper thought or consideration, and you are totally devoid of all love to him. Such in reality is your unhappy state and condition. But unless you are delivered from it, the consequence must, without doubt, be inconceivably awful and tremendous. As impenitent unbelieving sinners, you are obnoxious in the sight of God, and justly liable to his terrible indignation. And since this is the case, be assured, that unless you experience a gracious change, everlasting misery and torment must be your portion. At present you may laugh at the torments of hell and the exquisite miseries of the damned; but except you repent and be converted, you will, to your utter confusion, find them to be dreadful realities. So sure as there is a God, “the wicked shall not go unpunished.” There certainly is a place “where their worm dieth not, and where their fire is not quenched.” And as surely as ever they were born, “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God.” With whatever degree of supercilious contempt *Infidels* and

and *Deists* may treat the declarations of God's word, they will in the event be convinced of their just claim to credibility. The next world will effectually open such eyes as were shut in this. Tho' at present, they will not see what God has revealed in his word, yet, to their unutterable sorrow, they shall see it hereafter. Take warning then before it be too late,—be sensible of your extreme danger,—and flee from the wrath to come. Make Christ your refuge and sanctuary—and seek for pardon of sin and reconciliation with God thro' him.—Once more.

Thirdly, Let such as have any just reason to apprehend or believe, that they have received good and perfect gifts from God, be truly and sincerely thankful to him for the same. Remember they were not given to you in preference to others, because you were at all more deserving of them than they. None of the sinful race of mankind have the least claim whatever upon God, and the salvation of any is solely to be attributed to discriminating sovereign grace. Often think of that humiliating question, and let it operate suitably on your minds,—“Who maketh

maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou, that thou hast not received? Be not, then, high-minded; but rather strive to advance in self-knowledge and true christian humility. Let each of you in particular be led cordially to say with St. Paul, "by the grace of God I am what I am." As this is strictly and literally true with respect to each individual child of God, it well becomes such to be deeply sensible of it, and ready, on every suitable occasion, to acknowledge it to the glory of God. Take special care that you do not falsely and presumptuously arrogate to yourselves the praise of what divine grace alone hath effected on your behalf. As God has expressly declared that he will not give his glory to another, see that you do not by any means presume to deprive him of it. With the utmost care and circumspection guard against self-righteousness and self-sufficiency as utterly incompatible with the character and conduct of a child of God, or of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Cultivate a feeling sense of your sinfulness, guilt, and demerit, and endeavour to maintain a modesty and diffidence becoming creatures in such obnoxious debasing circumstances.

stances. Contemplate frequently God's goodness manifested towards you in creation, providence, and redemption, and confess to him, as the pious patriarch Jacob did, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shown unto thy servant," *Gen. xxxii. 10.* Make it your principal endeavour and aim to live as becomes the redeemed of the Lord; cleave to him with full purpose of heart; and strive to be obedient to his will in all things. In a word—"Be ye blameless and harmless the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom do ye shine as lights in the world," Amen.

THE END.

